DOCTORAL THESIS

Life histories of Saudi female headteachers
an exploration of their journeys and experiences of leadership

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Life histories of Saudi female head teachers: An exploration of their journeys and experiences of leadership

by

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Abstract

Gender inequality is especially evident in developing countries, where women are typically underrepresented in secondary school leadership. In Saudi Arabia, professional women's lives are shaped by social and cultural pressures in their home, education and professional lives. However, little attention has been paid to the professional experiences of Saudi women head teachers; their voices and experiences remain unheard and have yet to be systematically investigated.

This qualitative study employed a life history method to obtain data on twelve female head teachers of girls' secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with female principals from different girls' schools in a city of Saudi Arabia, exploring their perspectives on their roles, their involvement in decision making in their schools, their perceptions of challenges encountered, and how they overcame these challenges. Thematic analyses of the interview data centres on three key overlapping themes, namely: early childhood experiences and schooling, university life and early career experiences, and headship experience.

The study found that the position of Saudi female principals bears crucial similarities to that reported for women throughout the world. Saudi social structures created a lasting impact on participants' identities; gender inequalities impacted on their home life and education from early childhood onwards. Limited opportunities in higher education and cultural restrictions on women's roles narrowed their career options, leaving the education sector as the primary profession open to them.

Rising to a headship role nonetheless entailed significant administrative challenges. Participants experienced lacking the authority to adequately fulfil their roles, strained communications and difficult working relationships with educational supervisors and the ministry of education, limited training, and poor work-life balance. While these challenges restricted the participants' leadership and decision-making roles, participants could still advance their careers by drawing on their professional experience, their social networks, and the support of their families.

Acknowledgements

Lao Tzu said that the journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. My research journey over the past four years has been a tempestuous one; the load I had to pull was by no means light, and I thank the almighty god who sustained me with health and patience to continue such a journey to the point where I might see this modest academic contribution benefit generations to come.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

GPGE	-	General Presidency of Girls' Education
KSA	-	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MoE	-	Ministry of Education
MoHE	-	Ministry of Higher Education
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UAE	-	United Arab Emirates

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

> [With Equal Rights, Empowerment, Women Can Be 'Agents of Change']
> (Sixty-sixth General Assembly, United Nations, 11 October 2011).

Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing gradual social changes through its transformation programme for Vision 2030 (Hamdan et al., 2016; National Transformation Program, 2019). The reforms within the education sector, for instance, which encourage the participation of women in leadership positions have recorded some progress (Abalkhail, 2017; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Hamdan, 2017). Thus, there is increased hope that the situation of Saudi Arabian women will improve even more in future. As Saudi Arabian social researchers, the question that we need to ask ourselves is 'how can we contribute to the progress that Saudi Arabia is making?' There are many changes that need to be implemented, therefore, we cannot sit back and expect change to come on its own without our contribution. The change I would like to see is more empowerment of women throughout society.

I believe that education, as rightly observed (e.g. British Council, 2017) is Saudi Arabia's key source of empowerment. In this respect, I perceive academic research that focusses on the 'voiceless' as a positive step to making social contributions and progressions. My motivation is therefore, to undertake academic research that highlights the challenges (and also enablers) that women face in their journeys towards empowerment. Highlighting these aspects is important in order to contribute to the reforms

that Saudi Arabia is undertaking, so that these issues can be addressed accordingly. Indeed, a positive contribution in conducting this research will potentially improve upon the persistent constraints that undermine the development of women in the country, especially to leadership position. These constraints essentially hinder many women from reaching their full potential.

The underlying factors/forces that constrain the development of women can often be invisible or deeply embedded within everyday life. Women education has a significant role to play to overcoming these constraints (World Bank, 2014) and those who lead within women education must be supported. A key aspect of this support lies in giving them a voice so that they can be heard. Moreover, we can learn valuable lessons from these educational leaders, lessons that will make a meaningful impact on future leaders and future generations of Saudi women. The life histories of these female leaders, thus, forms a crucial body of evidence from which we can draw these lessons. As such, this study is motivated to give the life histories of female head teachers involved in girls' education which is the future to women empowerment (British Council, 2017).

My research aims at exploring the journeys and leadership experiences of Saudi female head teachers through their life histories. The scope of the research covers the entirety of the participants' lives from their experiences as young children up to the date of interview, focusing on their journey to leadership roles and including the impact of their early childhood and schooling. Moreover, I aim to explore in what ways the social construction of my participants' gender had an impact on their journeys towards leadership roles and offer a critical evaluation of their perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they faced in their leadership role. This research is conducted in the hope

that a further detailed study of the experiences of female head teachers in Saudi Arabia will improve the provisions and working environments for female school headship both within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the region at large.

This chapter is aimed at introducing the research. It gives the research background and outlines the research problem before stating the research's aim and research questions. The chapter also provides my motivation for undertaking this study through giving my personal professional experience which significantly influenced the research plans. Key to this introductory chapter also are the research questions that I answer in this thesis. The research questions are followed by a discussion of the significance of my choice of the research settings and the data collection methods. The chapter then concludes with a demonstration of the significance and originality of the study, through a discussion of how my research adds to the existing body of knowledge in the field. I also include an outline of the organisation and contents of the thesis' chapters.

1.2 Research Background and Context

The role of women in leadership and management is a topic that has been researched widely across a range of fields, including education, from different perspectives and foci. Some studies focus on the role of female leaders in their schools and their ability to fulfil their roles. Specifically, considerable research on this topic has been conducted with a focus on western educational settings (Bryant-Anderson and Roby, 2012; Davidson and Burke, 2011). These studies have shown that the social construction of gender has implications for female leadership. However, whilst there is a considerable amount of research conducted in western educational settings, comparatively

few studies have been conducted in Arab educational settings (Al-suwaihal, 2010; Arar et al., 2013; Omair, 2008; Robinson et al., 2017). The socio-cultural settings in the Arab regions are different from western settings (Arar, 2018; Arar et al., 2013; Lumby and Azaola, 2014; World Bank, 2018). This raises implications regarding the role of women in leadership not only in the education sector. A crucial example of an under-scrutinised setting for such research on female educational leadership is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (hereafter abbreviated KSA), where the education sector is centralized, and is guided by restrictive local cultural perspectives. Key among these restrictions is the practice of gender segregation, which is enshrined in law and operates at all levels throughout Saudi society.

Despite similar socio-cultural restrictions in the other Middle East countries, a growing body of literature highlights that the role of women in leadership and management has begun to emerge more strongly in recent years across the region, encompassing a range of sectors, including business, government and education (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Marmenout, 2009; Metcalfe, 2007; Shapira, Arar and Azaiza, 2011). However, these changes have yet to be observed in a Saudi context with respect to women in leadership roles, including senior leadership positions, in both public and private sectors (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

A variety of factors, including cultural values and the construction of gender, influence the role women play in leadership positions, contributing to the existing challenges and difficulties. For example, a key factor identified in the existing literature is the socio-cultural makeup of KSA. In a highly gendered society, it is often argued that female educators have less influence and limited roles because of the nature of this

male-dominated society (Badran, 2013). Regardless of the positions women hold, they are considered inferior to men, even to those who have comparatively lower qualifications and experience (Hamdan, 2005).

In this strictly gendered society, it is therefore culturally difficult for male employees and upper management officials at the MoE to understand the need for change in the professional lives of women, specifically through decentralising and deregulating a system that does not support them (Rizzo, 2017). The existing literature suggests that the position of women is socially constructed by the cultural and historical circumstances in which they live, and understanding these positions is dependent on understanding the specific cultural constructs (Burr, 2003). It is further suggested that women are positioned as the 'other' in the construct of identities in the patriarchal societies (Lather, 1991, p. 29). As such, the men occupy privileged positions in cultural, educational, academic and other aspects (Abalkhail, 2017; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). It would thus, appear that the social construction of gender and gender roles is a key factor emerging from the literature, which needs to be further explored in educational research.

Studies show that the participation of women in leadership roles in educational organisations in the KSA has also increased (Abdullah, 2008; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). However, along with this progress towards involving more women in leadership roles, it has been found that women face key challenges as leaders in these positions and have limitations placed on their decision-making powers that inhibit their effective fulfilment of these roles (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Some of the challenges and barriers which women leaders face in this regard include structural challenges and lack of empowerment (Al-

Ahmadi, 2011). These structural challenges include the limited authority given to women by men working at the ministry level, where most decisions regarding female schools are made (Badran, 2013). This negatively impacts on the performance and effective leadership of female head teachers in a Saudi context. The disconnection of (male) MoE managers from the conditions prevalent in female-only school environments impairs their ability to provide leadership and to make effective decisions, as Fraser (2007) points out that optimal decision-making within a leadership context usually entails experiencing the problems one seeks to resolve first. Lack of empowerment for women in the Saudi society is found to affect the ability of female leaders in respect of management and decision-making processes, as they do not have the necessary tools to exercise key leadership attributes (Metcalf, 2008). Moreover, female leaders lack the relevant information, knowledge, professional training and development opportunities needed for effective leadership roles (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

However, in recent decades, a movement of educational development and reform that has emerged in the Kingdom has resulted in the revision of key policies and practices relating to the role of women in leadership and management, such as the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz's 10-year Project for the Development of Public Education (Al-Hamadi, 2011). In the context of such reforms, the project of initiating significant changes to the education system, as with any protracted systemic change, places a crucial dependence on leadership. This requires both new and existing leaders to instigate, implement and steward the change (Mathis, 2010; Meemar, 2014).

Burke's (2008) insight, that leadership is key in determining whether an organization, educational or otherwise, survives or is consumed by change, remains crucially relevant because 'leadership matters' (p. 247). Saudi Arabia's reform of its system of women's education thus hinges upon offering a clear vision for the leaders who will, at the most fundamental level, drive these changes. This places an important role of the head teachers of girls' schools to these changes. For both policy-makers and educators, this entails not just an examination of these leadership roles and the perspectives that come with them, but also building towards a clear understanding of the leadership roles played by Saudi female principals. More than this, as Chance and Chance (2002) suggest, an understanding of the motivations of such leaders remains imperative if the education system is to sustain itself through serious and protracted change. The broader aims of these reforms are 'to prepare [Saudi] citizens for life and work in a modern, global economy' (Al-Faisal, 2006, p. 415). These aims are predicated upon an understanding of the leadership roles that will direct and implement this change.

There are three key reasons underpinning how this understanding is integral to the success of the reforms. First of these is the preparation for challenge as 'leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles' (Kotter, 1996, p. 25). The program of reforms will present challenges, and these challenges can only be overcome through effective educational leadership, particularly at the level of the individual school. Second is a shared vision, 'an essential component of effective leadership' (Bush, 2011, p. 7). These leaders must work towards a common vision and must thus be able to effectively collaborate to ensure that this vision of Saudi Arabia's educational future can be attained on a national scale. Lastly, the success of these reforms will depend on

the capacity of local leaders, at a school-by-school level, to facilitate change. Without high-quality leadership, it is impossible to make useful change effective (Bush, 2015).

1.3 Personal and Professional Experience

The stimulus for this research lies in my own experiences as a teacher for six years in a girls' secondary school in Saudi Arabia, where I gained insight into the role of female head teachers from first-hand experience. I observed that, despite female head teachers being considered as 'gatekeepers' of their schools, they could not fulfil their roles effectively. The head teachers I encountered in my professional career faced numerous challenges including lack of power in decision-making processes and lack of training and professional development. These factors frequently hindered them from implementing effective leadership and restricted their abilities to take action in response to challenges. The inability to respond effectively and take appropriate action in response to challenges created biases, tension and dissatisfaction among the head teachers I encountered and, most importantly, impacted negatively on the students and the school's academic outcomes.

Further, for my Masters Degree (MA), I followed up on these general perceptions of the challenges faced by Saudi female head teachers, conducting a study that focused on the difficulties faced by head teachers in Saudi female schools. My findings indicated that women head teachers experienced two key challenges, these being decision-making processes and having their voices go unheard by officials at the Ministry of

Education. However, I observed that female head teachers responded to these challenges in highly individual ways, despite being products of the same social norms and the same educational system.

Given the female headteachers' rise to leadership positions, I wish to understand their life journeys, which might also be a reflection of my own, and also highlight the distinctive challenges faced in the leadership experiences. In doing this, the voices of female head teachers in KSA can be amplified which can form an important step towards change and also a response to existing literature.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The socio-cultural pressures on women exist at all the stages in their lives. For the women in leadership positions, the socio-cultural pressures that arise from the gender construct continue to impact on their leadership experiences which creates additional constraints or challenges. Thus, the socio-cultural norms have permeated the institutional settings, continuing to exacerbate female inequality. For instance, what is observable in the case of girls' schools is that although problems encountered by female head teachers are routinely referred to male officials at the MoE, by virtue of gender segregation, these officials cannot even be present in the schools for observation, support or monitoring (Alajaji, 2012). This creates some inefficiency in the leadership and oversight, wherein MoE officials without direct experience of the context, have to make key decisions on behalf of the female principals.

Thus, my experiences and observations, together with a growing understanding of the literature on female leadership, made me focus on the leadership roles of female head teachers and how their challenges can be understood and addressed. In addition, given that the individualised responses to challenges that I observed could be rooted in a wide range of environmental factors, I felt that a life-history approach would offer a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by Saudi female head teachers, giving a more complete exploration of the individual journeys taken by Saudi women toward filling headship roles and their experiences of leadership.

Responding to the above-discussed gap in knowledge, and shaped by my personal and professional experiences, the current research thus seeks to investigate the real-life experiences of women head teachers more extensively which has scarcely been offered in the existing literature. This study concentrates specifically on investigating the life history of head teachers and their leadership journey with regard to factors that influenced this journey such as the role of gender, childhood experience, family support and social norms.

1.5 Research Aim and Research Questions

This research aims at exploring the life histories of women head teachers in girls' secondary schools in the KSA, investigating their individual journeys to headship positions and their experiences from their careers. It is focused on answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How did early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female head teachers' journeys towards leadership?

This question directs the study to looking at the impact that childhood and the early education experiences had on head teachers' life journeys to leadership. Childhood and education experiences have been found to have an influence on career aspiration (Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann, 2009; Nivala and Hujala, 2002; Osgood, 2004; Roberson and Kulik, 2007). Thus, addressing this question in the context of Saudi Arabia is a contribution.

RQ2: In what way did the social construction of the participant's gender impact upon their journeys towards and experiences of leadership?

This question reinforces the understanding that gender construction affects the entire life of a person, having implications for expectations and experiences at different stages, and shaping life experiences (Burr, 2015). As such, the question directs the focus to understanding the impact of gender on the different phases in the life journey to leadership and the leadership experiences too. This is particularly relevant in my study given that in any society, the social construction of gender aligns certain types of education, career choices, work and social position with a certain gender category (Binns, 2010; Mavin and Grandy, 2012).

RQ3: What are the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they face in their journeys towards leadership in respective schools?

Having attained the leadership roles, this question directs the focus to understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by the female head teachers. Importantly, the gender construct of leaders has been found to have an influence on leadership practices, styles, experiences and choices made (Acker, 2009; Coleman, 2011; Powell, 2010). Thus, from the Saudi Arabian context, the challenges

and opportunities that exist for female educational leadership are examined. It will also help highlight the coping strategies employed to overcome challenges.

By investigating the life histories of Saudi women head teachers, a more holistic understanding is advanced of the challenges that underlie female leadership. This is because the female head teachers' lives are situated within the wider social, economic, educational and political context (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016) of Saudi Arabia. This is also important given that past experiences have an effect in how one perceives the world and also reacts to it (Burr, 2015; Schwandt, 2000). As such, it is imperative that early life experiences are considered.

1.6 Theoretical Framework and Methodological approach

To achieve the aim of this study, which is to explore the life journeys of female head teachers to the headship position and understand the challenges they faced in their professional lives, I took a qualitative methodological approach utilizing the lens of social constructionism theory.

Social constructionism, as a theoretical and philosophical framework, postulates that the social world is constructed by individuals through their social practices (Burr, 2015) which makes it not fixed or external to the individuals. As individuals construct reality through their interactions, knowledge becomes historically and culturally specific which can be exhibited in the way concepts such as gender are understood in different cultures (Adya, 2008; Chandra, 2012; Murray and Syed, 2010; Frieze et al., 2012). Further, the historically and culturally specificity of knowledge is sustained by

social processes (Burr, 2015) and as a result of a negotiated process. These social processes determine who we are and how we perceive the world at large which is reflected in the values, practices and structures of meaning which are socially constructed, including gender. With particular reference to gender, it has been used to organize social relations in everyday life as well as in major social structures (Lorber, 1994; Szell and Thurner, 2013) such as social class (Brine, 2006; Hoskins, 2010; Reay, 2006) and the hierarchies of bureaucratic organisations (Acker, 2006; Blackmore, 2017; Heilman, 2001). It has become so pervasive or engraved in our everyday life that questioning it is taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions might be viewed as irrational (Lorber (2010). However, there is a need to highlight both the invisible and visible gender ideologies that foster gender inequality (Bassi et al., 2016; Lather, 1991, Hoskins, 2010; Mercer, 2009).

A social constructionist perspective seemed most appropriate to my study as I aim to understand the world from the female head teachers' points of view (Finkelstein, 2004). My research investigates their life stories in order to provide a better understanding of their journey towards experiencing headship at their school. As such, I took a social constructionist stance in looking at the experience of women head teachers within their social context, focusing on their daily activities and interactions. This is precisely the context in which social constructionism is most likely to offer a productive framework for understanding participants' experiences (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007). Using social constructionism, I could explore how participants 'construct' and 'interpret' their experiences of being head teachers and how these constructions and interpretations are influenced by key aspects of identity, including family background, gender and social perspectives.

From this social constructionist perspective, I adopted a life history approach for data collection. This qualitative methodological approach which consisted of in-depth life history interviews with 12 female head teachers from various secondary schools in KSA seemed most appropriate for my research. The life histories of the 12 female head teachers represented the stories they chose to share about various aspects of their private and professional lives which depended on many factors including their socio-cultural backgrounds and the environment they were brought up in. Thus, this offered a much deeper understanding of the women's journey to leadership.

A qualitative research method is the most appropriate choice for this research, in that qualitative methods seek to find out how and why things happen (Briggs, Morrison and Coleman, 2012). This was crucially relevant to the present research, as my aims focused on understanding how women head teachers attained school headship positions and filled their roles as school leaders. In addition, a qualitative methodological approach would enable me to collect 'rich' data that offered detailed descriptions of participants' viewpoints (Gray, 2013). The aim and objectives of this study were designed to engage the participants in such detailed descriptions in order to collect suitably rich data.

Further, the decision to employ a life history method to collect and interpret the personal stories of Saudi female head teachers was grounded in my personal observations of the complex influence of gendering in Saudi society's structure. This influence, which is frequently pervasive but difficult to quantify within an individual context, could be better observed within the wide-ranging format of life-history interviews.

This richness of data thus provided a substantial framework for interpreting these impacts on the study's participants' as a whole. As such, the life history method offered a significantly greater return in terms of information on participants' daily lives and experiences and allowed more comprehensive understanding of the influences of these experiences on the participants' leadership roles.

A further key concern in the methods for this study is that of access: due to the gender segregation of Saudi society, male researchers would not be able to gain access to female participants to conduct interviews. By comparison, such access was easy for me to obtain as I am familiar with the Saudi school environment and have encountered and experienced similar situations in my professional career. This problem of access also underlines the necessity for the study, as it contributes to the voices of female head teachers going unheard by policy makers and even by researchers. In this context, the life history method is particularly valuable for my research as it offers a chance for these voices to be heard and allows for a much deeper understanding of my participants' journeys than would otherwise be available. This is corroborated by Goodson and Sikes' (2001) findings that this method of studying the lives and stories of teachers gives them a voice which otherwise sometimes is unheard.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study rests on its contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field and its potential contribution to education policy in Saudi Arabia.

The review of the literature on women education leadership has shown that there are very few studies on women educational leadership in Saudi Arabia, particularly on women headship in girls' secondary schools. As such, this research will fill a significant gap. Moreover, it is intended that the findings of this study will open the door for future studies to further analyse the challenges that women head teachers face in specific cultural contexts – Saudi or otherwise – and effective methods of upholding their roles and responsibilities.

This study's significance also lies in advancing a methodological approach that has been underutilized in studies on school headship within the Saudi social context. In particular, life history as a method is underutilized in researching the unique experiences of women head teachers in conservative societies. Therefore, this study offers methodological value by demonstrating the feasibility of the life history approach, supporting the usefulness of the method as highlighted by some researchers (Bird and Ojermark, 2011; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Hoskins, 2012; Middleton, 1993) and highlighting its relevance to the study of Saudi educational leadership. The research also contributes in advancing the application of social constructionism theory in non-western settings. The theoretical lens of social constructionism theory has been useful in unmasking the gendered norms and constructions that affect women in Saudi Arabia.

More fundamentally, the findings of my research are based on women's experiences across their life histories, from their childhood right up to the point of interview. Giving voice to these stories, through the presentation of interview data, is in itself a significant act – especially within a Saudi context. By making the concerns, difficulties

and struggles of the study's participants heard, I hope that my findings will be useful in encouraging policy-makers and government institutions in general to support equality of opportunities for women and enable them to advance and excel in headship positions in Saudi Arabia.

1.8 Outline of Chapters

This thesis is divided into eight separate chapters. The current chapter introduces the context of the study, the research problem, aim and questions, provides a justification for the research methodology used, including its use of the life history approach from a social constructionist perspective. The significance of the study which include the methodological and policy-related contributions are discussed.

Chapter 2 provides the reader with a discussion of the research context including the development of the Saudi education system and the reforms. The history and development of women's schools and universities is then discussed before outlining the structure of the education system. The focus of the chapter then moves to discussing the role of head teachers, and then female head teachers in particular.

Chapter 3 provides a critical review of the existing literature. The chapter firstly defines leadership and discusses the different leadership styles. It then moves to discussing society's gender construction of leadership through outlining the propositions of social constructionism and how these apply to female leadership. The literature on women leadership, including the path to leadership, challenges, enabling/inhibiting factors and stimulating strategies, is then reviewed. This is followed by a particular

focus on female leadership literature in the Middle East. The aim is to identify the key debates and the existing literature gap.

In Chapter 4, the research methodology is presented. The ontological and epistemological standpoints of the social constructionism philosophical framework are discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the adopted qualitative research method of life history approach, justifying the choice and also outlining the in-depth interview process and the thematic analysis method employed in data analysis.

The subsequent three chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) present the findings of the study. These are organized according to the three key themes identified. These are: early childhood experiences and schooling (chapter 5), university life and early career experiences (chapter 6), and headship experiences (chapter 7). These three chapters provide an in-depth discussion of the findings. These findings and analysis are then linked to the existing literature. This provides a critical analysis and discussion which also highlights the contribution of this study to extant literature.

The last chapter draws conclusions, summarises the key findings, suggests recommendations based on the research evidence, presents the study's contribution to the current field of knowledge and cites implications. This final chapter also includes suggestions for future research based on the findings of the current study.

1.9 Summary

This chapter has given the reader an introduction to my research. It provides the research background and context, the statement of problem and the research aim and questions. An outline of the methodology and the social constructionism theory adopted was also given. Further, the significance of the study and the structure of the thesis have been outlined. The next chapter discusses the context of the KSA's education system and its historical development. The focus is on the aspects of the system responsible for women's education. This is important in order to give context to the study since my participants went through this education system.

Chapter Two: Overview of the Context of Women's Education in Saudi Arabia

2.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this qualitative study is to examine the life histories of women principals in Saudi Arabia through an exploration of their journeys and experiences of leadership. To achieve this aim, it is important to understand the context of the KSA's education system and its historical development, in particular the portions of the system responsible for women's education. This overview of the KSA's education system for women provides a framework within which the educational careers of this study's participants can be understood, and how changes to this system have impacted on their lives. This chapter presents a detailed historical description of female schools and universities in the country and the official bodies that oversee the provision of educational services.

To give the reader a sense of issues related to women school leaders, the chapter focuses on the role of headteachers in schools and the procedures and regulations for appointing them. The discussion will also include an overview of the cultural context for the KSA education system, providing a wider perspective on how key cultural concepts and constructions have shaped the educational context for this study's female participants.

2.2 Development of the Saudi Arabian Education System

Since its establishment, the education sector in KSA has grown in line with the country's development. When King Abdulaziz entered Maka in 1923, one of his first actions was to hold a meeting with professionals and scholars to promote education in the country. Later, in 1926, the king declared the establishment of the 'Knowledge Directorate' as the first Saudi educational institution and the initial nucleus of the education system (Alharbi, 2012).

Similar to many countries around the world, the KSA moved progressively in implementing educational reforms. The development of the education system in the KSA can be classified into five successive phases, outlined as follows:

- Establishment

The establishment phase in the development of the education system in KSA can be traced back to 1901. This phase involved mainly educating Bedouin people (the nomadic Arab people living in desserts) about religious beliefs and traditions at mosques (Alharbi, 2012). The commencement of this phase coincides with the beginning of the future King Abdulaziz's campaign to reconquer Riyadh and form the future Saudi Kingdom.

- Initiating educational policy

Starting in 1925, this phase witnessed many important early steps towards a national education system, including the establishment of the 'Knowledge Directorate'. It also

marked the founding of key educational institutions such as the Saudi Scientific Institute in Makkah, the Scholarship Preparation School, the College of Sharia and Teachers in Makkah, and the Princes' School in Riyadh. During this period, many professional teachers were invited from the rest of the Arab world to work in the education sector in the KSA. Primary education was made compulsory and free and, by the end of this phase, higher education was introduced (Algamdi and Abdeljawad, 2010; Alharbi, 2012).

- Expanding education across the country

This phase, which commenced in 1954, included laying down the legislative and technical basics for education, converting the 'Knowledge Directorate' into the Ministry of Knowledge and establishing the first university in the KSA in 1957. It also saw the establishment of the General Presidency for Girls' Education in1960.

- Comprehensive planning for education

This stage represents the commencement of an educational renaissance in KSA. A remarkable feature of this phase was the issuing of an important policy document in 1970 (reviewed in 1975), which ultimately became the foundation for education policy within the KSA. This document set out the basis for the education system, defining its purpose and objectives. Furthermore, in this period, many educational directorates and universities were founded, with an institute for technical education and vocational training being established in 1980. This stage also witnessed the emergence of the Comprehensive Curriculum Development Project in 1998. The educational careers of this study's participants intersect with this stage, and as such its developments represent the cornerstone in their respective pathways to education. Although this period

saw considerable alterations to the KSA education system, bringing it increasingly in line with Western educational philosophies and policies, as chapters five and six show, there were limitations to the teaching strategies and extracurricular activities available in women's education.

- The present education system

This phase started with the integration of the General Presidency for Girls' Education into the Ministry of Knowledge in 2002. The following year, the Ministry of Knowledge became known as the Ministry of Education (hereafter abbreviated MoE). King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz's 10-year Project for the Development of Public Education was launched in 2005 (Algamdi and Abdeljawad, 2010; Alharbi, 2012). In this stage, most of this study's participants were being appointed as head teachers. Although some schools remained under the leadership of foreign headteachers, the MoE was increasingly concerned with making all head teachers Saudi citizens. This policy facilitated my participants' path to the headship position as shown in chapter seven.
While the above phases outline the development of general education in KSA, the next section clarifies the specific development of women education, whilst taking into account cultural considerations affecting this development.

2.3 History of Women's Schools and Universities in Saudi Arabia

This section discusses the historical development of women's education in the KSA, the effects of cultural and political factors on this development, and the interaction between religious leaders and the initial opposition to the education of women. Before attempting to explore the development of women's education in Saudi Arabia, it is

worth giving the reader an overview of the Saudi social context as it relates to women. The Saudi community can be described as highly conservative, especially with respect to issues connected to women. Recently, several international and regional political events have influenced Saudi society and triggered contemporary debate regarding issues affecting women in KSA society (Hamdan, 2005). Debates on gender inequality, enablement of women, their right to drive, and women in the workplace are all ongoing within KSA society.

Many conservative, predominantly male, religious scholars are still calling for the exclusion of women from Saudi public affairs, supporting their claim through literal and selective interpretations of Quranic texts (Hamdan, 2005). This notion reinforces the restricted expectations of women's educational outcomes, wherein girls should be prepared for roles as obedient daughters, wives, and mothers. This would ultimately influence women's ability to seek employment and create many social barriers that conflict with their participation in public life, including in leadership roles (Ostrosky, 2015).

Until the late 1950s, informal education was the only choice available to girls in the KSA, predominantly in the form of private tutoring. Girls were sent to tutors' homes by their families to study religious education and gain knowledge relevant to their future roles as daughters, wives and mothers (Alyami, 2016). Secondary and higher education were not available for women at the time. Female access to formal education in the KSA only began 36 years after the introduction of boys' education. The reason behind this postponement was not solely the neglect of girls' rights to education: the inaccessibility of remote regions where the Bedouin people lived also had a substantial

impact on the delivery of educational services (Alamro, 2012). This logistic impediment was accompanied by the view that a co-educational environment might have a negative impact on students, as was the case in some neighbouring countries to KSA at the time (Al-Qasim et al., 2008).

Attempts to provide formal education for girls can be traced back to King Saud in 1959, when he sought support from the clerics in KSA in order to increase awareness among the Saudi community of its necessity (Alamri, 2011). Formal education for girls began in 1960 when the first public primary school for girls was established. This coincided with the establishment of the General Presidency for Girls' Education as an official education body responsible for planning, supervision and management of girls' education. Vocational education was also provided to the girls that aimed at equipping them with the necessary tools to deal with their future roles in the community (Al-Qasim et al., 2008). In subsequent decades (from 1960 to 2003), the number of students served by these schools increased steadily; over thirteen thousand schools were established, and more than three million students enrolled in these schools (Bubshait, 2008).

The first step to providing higher education in Saudi Arabia began with the establishment of the first college in 1949 (MoHE, 2013). However, this college was restricted to male students only, who graduated in religious studies. In the next five years, more male-only colleges opened (MoHE, 2013). The first university, King Saud University, was established in 1957 in the capital city of Riyadh. This year thus marks the inception of the higher education system in Saudi Arabia, although at this point it was still only available to male students (Alamri, 2011; Hamdan et al., 2016; MoHE, 2013).

Higher education experienced a protracted period of expansion and development in the KSA, undergoing several reform projects over the following decades. The turning point in the growth of the higher education sector was the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education in 1975, which was the formal body responsible for planning, funding, controlling, supervising, and establishing institutions for higher education. This growth in higher education opened the door to this study's participants, who had significantly better chances of obtaining higher education than previous generations of Saudi women, being easily able to enrol in university courses. According to the Higher Education Statistics Centre (2016), currently there are 28 universities run by the government across the KSA, serving 1,308,899 male and female students.

However, it is crucial to note that 60% of all university students are female (Hamdan et al., 2016). This may be because of the substantial employment opportunities available to men on completion of their secondary education. They are often able to find work without having certificates or technical qualifications. This discrepancy is exacerbated by the importance of the Saudi military as an employer, a career route not available to women. These issues relating to the education of women specifically thus frame the more general trends in education within the KSA as outlined in the following section.

2.4 Education System of Saudi Arabia

The aim of this section is to provide a brief discussion of contemporary educational policy in KSA, its ongoing developmental direction, and the challenges it faces. At the time of writing, the general education policy in KSA remains completely rooted in

Islamic principles, being heavily influenced by Islamic teachings. Specifically, the National Report on Education (2008, p. 11) defined the most important foundational beliefs pertaining to education in KSA. These include: belief in Allah and Islam as a religion, and belief in the status of the prophet Muhammad as the last messenger of Allah's will. As such, the education system is built around a comprehensively Islamic vision of the universe, humanity and day-to-day life. It is thus the state's responsibility to provide a religious education, with Muslim women's rights to education on such matters innately equal to those of Muslim men. This principle correlates directly to each phase of education outlined in the state public development plan (National Report on Education, 2008, p. 11).

The official structure of the education system in the KSA divides a student's education into three phases: preschool, compulsory, and higher education (MoE, 2017). Preschool education is optional and offered to students under the age of six, whereas compulsory education, beginning at age 6, consists of 12 years of education divided into three levels. Students entering compulsory education spend 6 years at primary level, followed by 3 years in intermediate and 3 years in secondary schools studying a range of subjects. Islamic religious subjects constitute one third of the primary level curriculum and 24% of the intermediate and secondary stage (Jamjoom, 2010). These figures highlight the heavy emphasis on religion as a basis for education in the KSA.

The school system is completely segregated by gender, with boys are educated by male teachers and girls taught by female teachers. In other words, mixing of the two genders is not allowed in the same educational setting at any education level throughout the country (Ostrosky, 2015). Besides public schools run by the government, the private

sector also provides education for both genders in the KSA. It is supervised by the General Department for Private Education in the MoE. Education services in this sector are offered to students in all educational levels including preschool/kindergarten, primary, intermediate, secondary, further, and higher education, but these services generally require the payment of fees by parents. In addition, according to the International School Consultancy (2016) there are 238 international schools in the KSA where a range of curricula are taught, mainly through the medium of English.

It is crucial to note that education in Saudi Arabi is free for all students at every level, including higher education. Students who successfully complete secondary school can apply for higher education at colleges and universities. To encourage students to seek higher education, the Saudi government pays monthly salaries to students who register at any public university until they graduate (Alamri, 2011). This offer by the government contributes to parents encouraging both male and female students to seek higher education opportunities, and which ultimately increases student enrolment in universities.

Although the KSA has conducted several reforming projects to improve the education system, the development of educational policy still encounters challenges such as the low number of students who lack suitable educational settings, the influence of globalisation on the internal education economy, and the modern revolution in information technology (Alyami, 2014). These challenges are further reflected in generally poor educational outcomes, and ongoing issues with teacher training (Hwaimel and Alanadi, 2015). Furthermore, some higher education majors are still unavailable to female students in most universities (Alhejji et al., 2018). My participants experienced these

issues when they were students, particularly the limitations placed on the choice of majors available to them, as discussed in chapter six.

Alogail (2013) attributes the problems of education in KSA to systemic problems with teacher training, school infrastructure and facilities, and the centralizing policies applied by the MoE. He indicates that teachers are neither sufficiently qualified nor trained to teach and deal with students: some teachers do not hold a degree in education, whilst others are not interested in developing their teaching abilities. School buildings are frequently unsuitable for the numbers of enrolled students who must use them, with facilities suffering from overcrowding (Alogail, 2013). Furthermore, in higher education, there are numerous problems in students' eligibility for entering university, which affects higher education outcomes (Algamdi and Abdeljawad, 2010). These systemic issues can be clearly linked to the execution of education policy within the KSA, and as such the next section provides a more focused perspective on the government bodies responsible for providing educational services in Saudi Arabia.

2.5 Government Authorities Supervising Education in Saudi Arabia

Prior to the unification of the Kingdom in 1932, there was no official institution supervising the educational services offered to students; education was provided by private initiatives until the MOE was established in early 1950s of last century to manage the education of boys while the official education of female was managed by the General Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE). In 2002, the two official bodies responsible were annexed under the MOE for managing educational services offered to students across the country. Currently, over a quarter of the Saudi general budget is spent

on education (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). The educational system is highly centralised with all responsibilities ultimately lying with the MoE (see Figure 1), and the official authorities involved in delivering education in KSA briefly are:

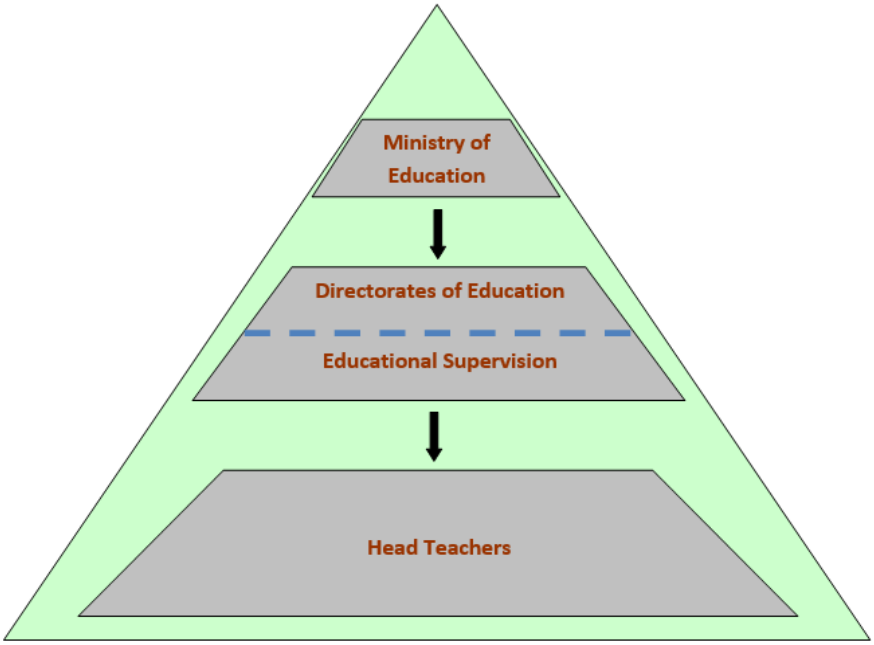

Figure 1: Official authorities involved in delivering education in KSA

The first phase represents the MoE which sets the general frameworks for educational supervision and manages the supervision process among the Educational Directorates. The second phase is formed by the Educational Supervision Centre in each Educational Directorate across all regional governorates of KSA. The Supervision Centres are responsible for making regular inspections of the schools in their assigned areas in order to evaluate the learning process and environment. These supervisors are closer to the situation in the field than the MoE's supervisors as they have immediate contact with teachers and principals.

The third phase represents the role of school leadership in supervising learning, which

is the responsibility of head teachers. The supervision of individual teachers' performance and the educational process in the school at large forms a key component of the day-to-day work of head teachers (Alshehri, 2014).

2.5.1 The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is the main government institution responsible for education and its duty is to secure free education for all Saudi citizens and residents, across all stages. This includes building new schools and public universities and equipping them with resources and course materials, training and certifying teachers and funding the staff who work in this sector (MoE, 2004). Throughout its directorates in the regions of the country, the MoE supervises a broad range of educational institutes, including public education for boys and girls, Holy Quran Study schools, private education, Adult Education and Literacy schools, special education programs, and foreign schools.

The MoE has the sole power of enacting educational laws, regulations and instructions. It is the central body that forms educational policy in the country and has complete authority over funding, curriculum content, employment of staff, regulation of the discipline system, and the appointment of school principals. This complete control of the education system headed by the MoE is applied to education services delivered for both men and women (Mathis, 2010; Alyami, 2014). Furthermore, whilst the MoE is the biggest ministry in the history of the KSA, so far, there exists only a limited amount of research investigating the MoE's role in education provision.

2.5.2 The Ministry of Higher Education

The Ministry of Higher Education (hereafter abbreviated MoHE) was established in 1975 to supervise, plan, and coordinate higher education services across the country in order to meet the kingdom's developing economic, social and political needs. The MoHE ensures the delivery of higher education to successful students from secondary school and is responsible for establishing universities and community colleges across the country. It also offers scholarships to students regionally and internationally and facilitates delegated students' studies (Alyami, 2014). Furthermore, as part of the continuous educational reforms that the KSA has planned, King Salman bin Abdulaziz issued a royal decree to merge the MoHE with the Ministry of Education in 2015, which is always managed by a male minister.

2.5.3 Directorates of Education

In each province of the KSA, there are a pair of official agencies, called directorates of education, one for male and one for female students. All boys' schools in the directorate's assigned area fall under the supervision of the directorate of education for boys, and all girls' schools follow the directorate of education for girls. The directorates of education across the country constitute the link between a province's schools and the MoE.

Under the directorates of education, exclusively female superintendents are appointed to supervise girls' schools. Unlike the male directors, they have direct contact with the

school, and as such female superintendents wield considerable power over school processes, including over recommendations for employment, hiring and dismissals. In consultation with the superintendent, a school head is allowed to suggest management for teachers such as transferring teachers from one school to another. At the intramural level, the role of the head teacher is limited to overseeing the implementation of the curriculum (AlMunajjed, 2009; Alyami, 2014; Alsharari, 2010).

Although the educational supervisors are supposed to be experts in the field and are carefully selected, they face ongoing challenges in their work. These include a lack of supervisory experience and preparation, insufficient time spent in schools, and the extreme centralization of the system for appraising supervisors' reports and responding to them (Alhabeeb, 2006). Despite this, educational supervisors hold key responsibilities within the process of appointing head teachers and evaluating their performance in their roles.

2.6 The Role of the Head Teacher and the Appointment Process

The word ‘head’ is translated to in Arabic language to the word ‘*ra’s’ which* indicates the most important part of the human body, and consequently, the head teacher represents the most important person in the school. In Arabic, the word ‘head teacher’ is largely equivalent to the word *muder* for men and *mudera* for women, with both words signifying the concept of ‘manager’ rather than ‘leader’. Thus, there exists within KSA a prevailing cultural belief that the role of school head teachers is more managerial than leading (Mathis, 2010; Meemar, 2014). Whilst the KSA educational system does

not officially structure the roles of male and female head teachers any differently, cultural and social norms mean that men can perform their role more freely. As this study focuses on women head teachers, in the interests of clarity the following section discusses the role of female head teachers and the recruitment process.

2.6.1 The Role of Female Head Teacher

To understand the role of female head teachers in the KSA, it is important to look at Saudi cultural perspectives on women being in a headship position and how the social construction of their gender and their roles influences their performance. Saudi Arabia is predominantly Islamic and administered under Sharia law by followers of the Wahhabi branch of Islamic tradition. This application of Sharia law entails the strict segregation of the sexes, with women not permitted to come into contact with males they are not related to either by blood or marriage. For this reason, women head teachers are only allowed to lead female schools, wherein the entire staff consists of women. Whereas in other parts of the world this would raise questions of gender inequality, in Saudi Arabia, this system fosters clear discrimination that is both historical and deeply engrained in social, religious and cultural beliefs (Alsweel, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Rajasekar and Beh, 2013). For example, the head teacher of a girls' school can only interact with female parents or guardians, a frequent source of frustration and miscommunication, especially when these parents and guardians are illiterate (Alakarni, 2014). In this context it is hardly surprising that the existing literature points to a lack of support and close monitoring between the schools and parents (Alakarni, 2014; Alsharari, 2010).

The general role of the school principal (regardless of gender) is working to fulfil the educational goals as set and approved by the MoE. However, the Organisational Manual for Public Schools issued by the MoE (2014) mandates the responsibilities for school leaders as shown in Table 1 below.

Responsibilities of school leaders in Saudi Arabia
• Supervision of setting up a general school plan • Distributing tasks to all staff at school at the beginning of the school year • Leading school education and learning processes and preparing their annual operating plan • Following up the school's operational budget with the relevant authority in the local Educational Directorate • Supervising and preparing required facilities and equipment of the school on time • Identifying the school's educational and administrative needs and acting to secure them • Organizing and documenting incoming and outgoing communication with the MoE • Following up the performance of the educational and administrative workers in the school by visiting them and observing their work and activities • Tracking instructional processes and encouraging teachers • Participating in underpinning staff capabilities and fostering a vocational learning community • Coordinating and collaborating with the educational supervisors in their local Educational Directorate • Briefing the school's staff on the MoE's regulations and letters, and ensuring they follow the MoE's instructions throughout their work • Reinforcing the school's social role by encouraging voluntary work • Conducting regular meetings with students' parents • Undertaking any other tasks that might be assigned by the MoE

Table 1: Responsibilities of school leaders according to MoE manual

This relatively exhaustive list is indicative of the MoE's perspective on the position of school principals, with limited emphasis on the responsibility of head teachers to exercise leadership and initiative within their roles. Instead, the above list emphasizes the importance of supervision and consultation with superior authorities within the role. This aspect of the roles of women head teachers in Saudi Arabia has not been the subject of research, yet, as this study's data shows, they experience a range of key issues in discharging their responsibilities to which modern leadership theories would

apply.

2.6.2 The Head Teacher Appointment Process

In each school in KSA, there is one principal and a number of deputies or assistants, the number of principal's assistants being allocated based on the number of students enrolled at the school. The requirements for school leadership candidature as set out by the MoE include holding a bachelor's degree, possessing at least 4 years' experience in teaching (for a deputy position) and two years' experience in a deputy role (for a head teacher position), being evaluated as 'excellent' 2 years prior to submission of the application, must have not committed or been involved in unfair practices during the last three years, should show sufficient ability in using ICT resources, must have not exceeded the absence limit during the last two years, and must have successfully passed an interview with a nominated panel.

At the beginning of the academic year, each Educational Directorate declares the leadership vacancies across the governate, explaining the terms and conditions. The candidates are asked to fill in a specific application form and the applications undergo a scrutiny procedure. This competition procedure ends with an interview with the candidature, to establish who is eligible for the leadership position (Mathis, 2010). Further, male candidates can only apply for school leadership position in male schools and vice versa.

It is crucial to note that this process of head teacher recruitment was not comprehen-

sively applied when my participants advanced to the headship position. This is primarily because many participants were appointed during a period of substantial expansion of secondary education for women, with many new schools being established and numerous headship vacancies needing to be filled, as discussed in chapter seven.

2.7 Context Contribution

The main body of this chapter has focused on the background and context of women's education in the KSA and its developments, the education system in KSA in general, and its impact on the role of female head teachers. By reviewing the background and context of the study, I aim to present a better understanding of the situation of the study in order to identify the gap in existing knowledge the current study aims to satisfy. Saudi Arabia has a unique social context that influences women's education and experiences of leadership. To my knowledge, my study is the first to examine the life histories of female head teachers within this unique social context. Thus, this study will fill a significant gap in this field of research, taking into account the impacts of social constructions of participants' gender on their journeys through education, to their leadership positions and their subsequent performance in these roles. Within the presently available literature, the life history approach is rarely utilized in a Saudi educational context and allows for unique insights into the impact of participants' early childhood experiences and schooling on their career. This study will thus contribute to the existing literature in this area of research, particularly for the international reader.

This study's significance is particularly enhanced when taking into account the fact that most of the extant literature on women's educational leadership was produced in

Western countries. In a Saudi context, studies have been produced almost exclusively in Arabic, either in the KSA or in other Arabic universities by Saudi students. Few studies have been carried out in Saudi Arabia and published in English. Access to such studies in Arabic is restricted, principally because the institutions and universities concerned provide abstracts, rather than complete versions, of the studies. However, using the available resources has paved the way to a clearer picture of the background of the KSA educational system and the wider social and cultural climate in the country, insofar as it pertains to the roles of female head teachers. This process significantly assisted in my analysis of the data and fomented the discussions that provided the study's answers to my research question.

Presenting the Saudi educational contexts in this way has assisted me in developing a better understanding of the journey of female head teachers towards their headship positions. Reviewing and developing my understanding of the conditions in which these journeys took place and their wider context has materially benefited my research in two key ways. Firstly, it assisted me in developing both my specific research questions and the question framework for the semi-structured interviews with participants, highlighting key areas for these interviews to explore. Secondly, it helped in developing my understanding and the thematic analysis of the study data.

2.8 Summary

In this chapter, it has been highlighted that the development of education specifically for women in Saudi Arabia has been influenced by social, cultural, and political fac-

tors. While at the beginning of the Kingdom's establishment, educating girls was perceived as an unnecessary and sometimes even a shameful practice. However, within the past decade, over half of students enrolled in higher education institutions are female.

Further, the chapter has shown that public education services are open and free to all Saudi students at all levels from primary to higher education, within a system that is completely segregated by gender. The educational system of the KSA is highly centralized and governed by public authorities. In addition, there remains a dearth of literature on the education system in KSA, whose processes and outcomes are generally still under researched.

In terms of school headship, principals are appointed by the MoE according to a predetermined nomination process. While there are some requirements upon the teachers who wish to apply for the position, particularly in terms of teaching experience, the regulations were not consistently applied to the participants in this study. Much of responsibilities for these roles remain on the head teachers' shoulders, whilst MoE policy tends to reduce their power to adequately discharge these responsibilities.

Reviewing the system of women's education in KSA shows that there are still numerous aspects of the educational process that require further research, most particularly into how cultural and social constructions influence women's educational journeys. This provides motivation to undertake this research which encompasses the influence of socio-cultural factors and gender constructs on the life journeys of the principals. The principals of girls' schools remain an important group contributing to educational

development in the country. As the research published in English relating to this issue is still limited, conducting a more detailed investigation into the challenges and responsibilities faced by female school principals is needed to establish policies that will produce effective, positive change in the KSA education system. This explains the objectives of the research and thus, the developed research questions (see section 1.5). Progression to this endeavour is enhanced by an understanding of the literature which is reviewed in the next chapter in order to complement the contextual understanding developed in this chapter. Thus, the next chapter reviews the available literature related to women in school leadership both globally and locally.

Chapter Three: Women leaders in education: a review of related literature and theories

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two gave a contextual overview of the education system and educational leadership in Saudi Arabia. The aim was to give context to this study on female leadership in Saudi Arabia country, whose political, socio-cultural and economic landscape is uniquely different from other countries (especially western countries) (Abed and Davoodi, 2003; Eriksen, 2012; Hofstede, 1991; World Bank, 2018). Crucially, different national or regional contexts have an influence on leadership and gender (Ayman and Korabik, 2010; Bass, 1997, Mendenhall et al., 2017; Milton-Edwards, 2018; Stelter, 2002; Trinidad and Normore, 2005) as these aspects are 'partly dictated by the demands and constraints of context' (Klenke, 2017, p. 7). As the research aims to investigate gender and leadership as socially constructed concepts through a life history approach (see section 4.4) in Saudi Arabia's education sector, it is imperative that these concepts are defined, and direction is given to the key debates underlying these concepts which are relevant to this study.

Thus, this chapter will review the literature on leadership, particularly on women and leadership. The chapter will further discuss how society constructs leadership and thus, the impact of society's gender construct on leadership, as highlighted, for instance, by Sinclair (2005, p. 16) that 'leadership is a mythical construction, fulfilling emotional and spiritual needs which have strong *cultural* and *collectively constructed roots*' (em-

phasis added). In this regard, the challenges and factors that influence female leadership will be reviewed in general, and then particularly with respect to the Middle East countries.

The chapter starts by defining leadership and discussing the different leadership styles which are relevant to this study (sections 3.2 and 3.3). A critique of the approaches in leadership studies is then highlighted (section 3.4) before delving into society's gender construction of leadership (section 3.5). The aim is to highlight the factors that affect female leadership, and in particular, how the social construct of gender affects this leadership role. Thus, section 3.5 introduces and discusses social constructionism theory with respect to female leadership. A review of the literature on women and leadership, including the path to leadership, challenges, and enabling/inhibiting factors and stimulating strategies, is conducted in sections 3.6 to 3.10. A particular focus on female leadership literature on the Middle East countries, which have relatively similar characteristics to Saudi Arabia, is also made in the discussion.

3.2 Definitions and Perspectives of Leadership

As this study explores female head teachers in their leadership role of the girls' secondary schools in Saudi Arabia, it is vital that an understanding is developed of the term leadership in the educational settings. Educational leadership has grown as an interdisciplinary and eclectic field of study (Dunn et al., 2014; Kezar et al., 2015; Lumby and Coleman, 2007; Quinn et al., 2017). Thus, Lumby and Coleman (2007, p. 2) argue that 'educational leadership has always been eclectic in adapting research and practice from a range of disciplines and contexts for its own different purposes'. As

such, there is no finite and immutable definition of leadership (Goddard, 2003; Lumby and Coleman, 2007), or, as Stogdill (1974, p. 7) succinctly suggests, 'there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept'. The search for a single definition of leadership is thus pointless (Bass and Bass, 2009), as different definitions from different perspectives have been provided (Ali et al., 2013; Harris and Lambert, 2003; House et al, 2004; Lok and Crawford, 2004; McCleskey, 2014; Miller et al, 2002; Northouse, 2018; Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002). Individual contexts and perspectives, which include culture, gender, ethnicity, knowledge, experiences, communication skills and relationships, have all influenced the conceptualization or definitions of leadership (Bush, 2011; Jackson et al., 2015; Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002) making the term highly arbitrary and subjective (Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002). Leadership has also been described as a lasting ambivalent term due to its arbitrary and subjective nature (Alvesson and Spicer, 2014; Bush and Glover, 2003). In order to gain a wider insight into leadership of women, the discussion of the definitions below draws from both non-educational and educational sectors. Some leadership aspects emphasized in the definitions will be highlighted.

One key aspect in leadership is the ability to 'influence' others. This aspect is observable in definitions among the early contributors such as that of Tannenbaum et al. (1961) of leadership as the 'interpersonal influence, exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals' (p. 24). Subsequent definitions of leadership retained influence as a key concept and introduced other concepts of 'vision' and 'motivation' in addition to influence (Kouzes and Posner, 2007; Harsey and Blanchard, 1993; House et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2002; Schermerhorn, 1999; Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002). Kouzes and Posner's

(2007, p. 30) definition, for instance, highlights the aspect of motivation in stating that leadership 'is the art of mobilizing others to believe and share their aspirations' while Hannagan (2008, p. 37) captures this aspect in defining leadership as 'the process of motivating other people to act in particular ways, in order to achieve specific goals'. Thus, leadership involves the influence and guidance provided to others to achieve organisational goals (Northouse, 2018). Further, in order for the influence and motivation aspects to be significant, the leadership traits of the person leading (leader), particularly behaviour and capacities, are critical. Thus, a leadership role should be supported by appropriate behaviour and capacity in order to influence others' behaviours based on individual and organisational goals (Hersey et al., 2001; Landis et al., 2014; Lok and Crawford, 2004; Northouse, 2018). This leadership behaviour is exhibited in the leadership styles (Goleman, 2017; Lok and Crawford, 2004) which contributes to organisational success or failure (see section 3.3).

The aspect of 'vision' is identifiable in some definitions such as that of Kotter (1999, p. 10), who defines leadership as 'the development of vision and strategies, the alignment of relevant people behind those strategies, and the empowerment of individuals to make the vision happen, despite obstacles'. In this context, leadership goes beyond setting the vision to translating it into reality (Bennis, 2000; Richards and Engle, 1986). Consistent with the aspect of formulation and translation of vision into reality is the need to manage change (Drucker, 2012; Robbins, 2003; Schein, 2010). In this respect, Schein (2010) argues that leadership is about stepping outside the culture to start evolutionary change processes that are more adaptive whilst Robbins (2003, p. 313) argues that leadership is about 'coping with change, leaders establish direction by developing a vision of the future; then they align people by communicating this

vision and inspiring them to overcome hurdles'. In Robbins (2003) definitions, the aspects of change, vision, inspiration and communication are evident. These aspects of leadership, including motivation and influence, are important in today's continuously changing organisational environments.

Leadership can also be viewed as either a practice or process or both. Leadership as a process can be seen in some definitions above (e.g. Hannagan, 2008; Hollander, 1978; Jacobs and Jacques, 1990; Robbins, 2003; Schein, 2010; Stogdill, 1974) and also in Yukl's (2006, p. 8) definition of leadership as 'the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively and facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives'. Other definitions above perceive leadership as a collective practice (e.g. Bennis, 2000; Handy, 2012; Kotter, 1999; Richards and Engle, 1986; Schermerhorn, 1999) and in the context of educational settings such as schools, this involves acts such as influence, support, motivation, guidance, vision and change, which are necessary in order to achieve organization objectives (Bush and Glover, 2003). These acts of leadership can be carried out by individuals or groups in either formal and informal settings or positions (Bush, 2008).

In schools, leadership involves, among other aspects, inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision for the school that should be based on clear personal and professional values. The school leaders would articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share in the vision. This is crucial, as leadership is essentially 'a force that guides and shapes an institution' (Bond, 2000, p. 81). Accordingly, the philosophy, structures and activities of the

school should be geared towards the achievement of a shared vision (Bush, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Matthews and Crow, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2007).

Contrary to the definitions which perceive leadership as either a process or practice, other contributors focus on the position and the influential efforts and abilities of the individual (or group) in leadership (Bass, 1990; Ford, 2005; Hersey et al., 2001; Jogulu and Wood, 2006; Winston and Patterson, 2006). In this context, leadership is perceived as holding a position within the organisational hierarchy and possessing the appropriate leadership traits or characteristics needed to articulate the organisational mission, the goals to fulfil the mission, a plan for pursuing the goals and strategies for implementing the plan (Drucker, 2006; Jerry, 2013; Kouzes and Posner, 2007).

Further, contrary to the perspective of leadership as either a process or practice, leadership has also been viewed as a relationship (Howell and Shamir, 2005; Richards, 2005; Rost, 1993). However, this relationship is not simple but complex and dynamic (Burns, 1978) supported or hindered by the communication process (Donelly et al., 1985; Tannenbaum et al., 1961). Other contributors (Donelly et al., 1985) have gone further to define leadership as a communication process. In this respect, effective communication becomes an important characteristic of leadership.

As highlighted above, leadership is a contextual, arbitrary and subjective term. Further, most of the definitions above assume that institutions and individuals working in organizations behave in a similar or cooperative manner and thus will respond singularly to the external influences of leadership. However, this is rarely the case, as demon-

strated by different studies on organisational culture (Cheung and Halpern, 2010; Griffin and Moorhead, 2014; Kawatra and Krishnan, 2004; Stewart, 2010). As leadership is contextual and subjective, it is crucial to explore its conceptualization and application in the educational sector, as this sector provides the context of this study.

3.2.1 Distinguishing 'Leadership' and 'Management'

The general aspects of leadership (such as influence, motivation, inspiration, change, communication) are applicable to the educational sector. In the application of this overview to educational settings, a distinction between leadership and management is imperative in order to render the focus on leadership more vivid. In addition, this distinction provides crucial clarity on the terms used in this study's analysis of the perspectives held by the female head teachers in Saudi Arabia.

Several overlaps exist between leadership and management, especially with regard to the duties or functions that managers and leaders have to perform and their roles in influencing and working with people to achieve common goals (Coleman and Earley, 2005; Jackson and Parry, 2008; Kotterman, 2006; Northouse, 2018). Despite the overlap, leadership and management are not the same. Thus, many researchers emphasize the differences between the two, and highlight that disregarding these differences would inevitably impact the development, measurement, assessment, and endorsement of them (Balon, 2014; Bolden, 2011; Davis and Harden, 2002; Kotter, 2006; Toor and Ofri, 2008). In this respect, Bush (2011, p. 17) argues that one should 'lead, not manage: there is an important difference' while Bass (1990, p. 383) states that 'leaders manage, and managers lead, but the two activities are not synonymous. Management

functions can potentially provide leadership; leadership activities can contribute to managing. Nevertheless, some managers do not lead, and some leaders do not manage'. Similarly, Bennis (1989, p. 7) highlights 'leaders, not managers. The distinction is an important one. Leaders conquer the context while managers surrender to it'. In the context of educational leadership, one of the main challenges in distinguishing between leadership and management is that the top school officials/managers/principals in discharging their daily work are usually unaware if they are managers or leaders. In this regard, Cuban (1998) highlights the distinction between leadership and management in stating that educational management would involve the efficient and effective maintenance of the school/institution's current activities whereas leadership would put emphasis on the needed change within the school/institution. Thus, the leadership process creates some level of uncertainty and change (Lunenburg, 2011) in the school. Similarly, Bush (2008, p. 1) argues that educational management is 'an executive function for carrying out agreed policy' whilst leadership is 'the responsibility for policy formulation and, where appropriate, institutional transformation'.

Further, in the particular context of the Saudi Arabian educational system (see Chapter 2), reference to individuals heading an institution in Arabic as either 'modeara' (for a female) and 'modear' (for a male) roughly translates as 'manager' rather than 'leader' (Al-Amian, 2009; Al-Qahtani, 2003; Mathis, 2007). Mathis (2010, p. 23), for instance, reveals that 'the Saudi Arabian education system trains principals to be managers, not leaders'. Given this perspective, it is envisaged that there would be both institutional and social-cultural (gender) barriers to the role of leadership. Nonetheless, both leadership and management are important elements in the successful operations of educa-

tional institutions (Bolden, 2011; Bush, 2010). Thus, Kotter (2001) argues that leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary activities necessary for success in a changing environment. Further, as this study explores the leadership of female school head teachers, which involves an examination of their roles and involvement in schools, aspects of both leadership and management will be addressed despite the wider inclination towards leadership.

3.2.2 Educational Leadership

Educational leadership has been widely recognized as a critical factor in educational institutions' effectiveness and a key contributor to the education system's organization and overall success (Balon, 2014; Bolden, 2011; Bras and DeMillo, 2017; Earley and Weindling, 2004; Pijanowski, 2017; Waite and Bogotch, 2017). In schools, Southworth (2002) argues that effective leadership is a crucial component for success as schools have to deal with several changes. School leadership plays an important role in adapting to changes and is necessary for the achievement of successful results. Thus, in order to achieve the desired educational success in schools and bring about change in an educational system like Saudi Arabia, Mathis (2010) argues that it is vital to understand the leadership roles and perspectives of the leaders, which in this study are female school head teachers (see sections 3.6 to 3.10 below).

Instituting change, which is an important aspect of leadership (as discussed above), nonetheless requires a leader to have the ability to make proper decisions regardless of the context. Leadership requires 'stepping outside the culture' (Schein, 2010, p.

175) and ‘coping with change’ (Robbins, 2003, p. 432). This requires good management and decision-making skills and, as Uzonwanne (2015) emphasises, it is a critical skill that leaders should possess in order to manage change in their work environment. In this context, appointment to a leadership position in education institutions should be based on the leadership ability of the individual (Baxter, 2016; Gorton et al., 2006; Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016). Several factors could influence the educational leadership process (Baxter, 2016; Gorton et al., 2006; Owens, 1995). Khan (2015), for instance, argues that the leadership process of head teachers is highly influenced by their personal values and experiences. Further, low confidence levels which might be a result of the general lack of pre-service training and societal (and thus subordinates’) perspectives have an impact on the leadership process (Khan, 2015). The status and power attributed to the position of head teacher within the educational system was also found to be significant to the leadership role in Khan’s (2005) study. Most relevant to this study on female leadership in Saudi Arabia is the influence of social factors on the leadership process (Argyle, 2017; Northouse, 2018) as leadership is tacitly a social process (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010).

Studies have shown that the style of leadership, for instance, is affected by the external factors, which include: the organisational environment, demographics, staff characteristics, resources, economic and political factors, technology and (both national and organisational) culture (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010; Cravens and Hallinger, 2012; Hallinger and Heck, 2010). Thus, Cheong (2000) argues that a more holistic approach to understanding leadership role in educational reform should consider both the personal and socio-cultural factors. As such, any framework for educational change/reform should consider the societal, community, school, and classroom influences

(Chen, 2008; Hallinger and Heck, 2010). With respect to cultural norms, for instance, these can either provide those in leadership with significant position, power and informal authority necessary to sustain change processes. However, the same cultural norms can also hinder progressive change when those in leadership are perceived, based on gender for instance, to lack the culturally embedded power and authority (Jawas, 2017) which then creates inherent resistance to change. In discussing gender, Ayman and Korabik (2010, p. 157) argues that culture (and other social factors) is automatically brought into the picture as 'the two coexist in close symbiotic association'. In this study on female leadership in Saudi Arabia, both personal attitudinal factors and socio-cultural factors will be highlighted using a life history approach.

The next section builds on the understanding developed above to discuss the key leadership styles which are relevant in the context of Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Leadership Styles and their Application in the Education Sector

Several leadership theories have been proposed in the literature, which is unsurprising considering the different conceptualizations or perspectives on leadership (see section 3.2). These theories could usefully be categorized into personal theories (which include behavioural and authentic theories) (McGregor, 1960; Ryan and Scott, 1995; Van Seters and Field, 1990), contingency theories (which include situational, contingency and path theories) (Bass, 1990; Evans, 1970; Fiedler, 1964; Fleisman et al., 1955; House, 1971) and leadership style theories (which include participation, transactional, transformational, distributed, managerial and transcendental theories) (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Cardona, 2000; Greene, 1975; Katzenbach and Smith, 1993;

Vroom and Yetton, 1973). However, as leadership is context-specific and subjective, a model of leadership in one context or era might be unsuitable in another (Ekiz, 2005; Harris and Lambert, 2003).

Therefore, whilst it is useful to understand the different leadership theories which focus on the relationship between leaders and followers (subordinates), their application to a particular context is more important (Ayman and Korabik, 2010; Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010; Ekiz, 2005; Jawas, 2017). Based on this understanding, not all the theories on leadership were helpful in identifying the main issues from the female head teachers' life stories about their leadership experiences. The leadership style theories (particularly transactional, transformational and managerial) adopted have been deemed the most useful in addressing this study's research objectives. The selected three leadership styles are discussed below in order to aid the interpretation of the Saudi Arabian female head teachers' leadership style within the framework of these theories. One strength of the leadership style theories lies in context being embedded in these theories, linking situations to leadership style (Avolio et al., 2009; Antonakis and Day, 2017; Fiedler, 1967; Grint, 2005; House, 1971). Further, as Hersey and Blanchard (1993) argue, leaders must adapt their leadership style to the situations they are confronted with as there is no one best leadership approach. The situations to which leaders should adapt their approaches are defined by different social-cultural factors.

In this respect, the leadership theories are useful in interpreting the Saudi Arabian head teachers' leadership styles as applied to the different situations that they are confronte. An understanding is developed from the female head teachers' experiences regarding their individual leadership styles that worked (or did not work) to attain organisational

goals or satisfy subordinates. Further, whilst 'leadership theories concern themselves with explaining the role of leaders and how leadership influences the effectiveness of organizations' (Chance and Chance, 2002, p. 85), the mechanism through which leadership is transmitted or enacted can be understood by the various leadership styles that leaders may exhibit (Dessler, 2004; Harris, 2008; Hernandez and Roberts, 2012). Therefore, a theoretical understanding of leadership styles and their application in the educational sector is illustrative. This is crucial in this research as the perspectives of the female head teachers in their leadership approaches could be better understood or interpreted using the various leadership styles. A discussion of the major leadership style theories of transactional, transformational and managerial theories follows in the next section.

3.3.1 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership focuses on the principle of mutual exchange between leaders and followers, that is, followers' needs satisfaction in exchange for effective task completion (Bass and Bass, 2009; O'Shea et al., 2009; Yukl, 2013). It is essentially an exchange-based relationship between the leader and followers that enables the leader to 'achieve performance objectives, complete required tasks, maintain the current organisational situation, motivate followers through contractual agreement, direct behaviour of followers toward achievement of established goals, emphasize extrinsic rewards, avoid unnecessary risks, and focus on improving organisational efficiency' (McCleskey, 2014, p. 122). However, to achieve these, the leader has to motivate the followers through some reward. Thus, transactional leadership involves using rewards to motivate employees in order to achieve the desired goals (Pearce and

Sims, 2002). In this respect, a transactional leader should have the ability to recognize the followers' needs and to supervise followers' respective role fulfilment in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

The transactional leader should also be able to clarify followers' responsibilities and monitor their work which should be rewarded when the objectives are met or corrected when the objectives are not met (Avolio et al., 2009; Bass, 1998; Yukl, 2013). Further, whilst the transactional leader moves to achieving the desired outcomes, the followers also move towards fulfilling their own self-interests hence the mutual exchange (Bass and Bass, 2009; Yukl, 2013). The fulfilment of self-interests or needs contributes to reducing the followers' workplace uncertainties and enables them to concentrate on attaining clearly articulated organisational objectives (Bass et al., 2003; McCleskey, 2014; Yukl and Mahsud, 2010). Thus, in principle, the organisational goals are achieved to the extent that the individuals gain hence the need for some goal congruence at which the satisfaction is mutual. In this leadership style, the power of the leader lies in the ability to award rewards, which is effectively resource or reward power (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010; George and Jones, 2008; Robbins and Decenzo, 2005).

Transactional leadership is applicable in many organisations, educational settings included, as it has a simple mechanism and entails only a fixed mutual relationship between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2018; Popper and Zakkai, 1994). The follower is explicitly or implicitly motivated through the exchange of rewards, praise and promises. Further, empirical evidence has supported the relationship between transactional leadership style and organisational effectiveness in some settings (Bass

and Riggio, 2006; Bass et al., 2003; Groves and LaRocca, 2011; Hater and Bass, 1988; Liu et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2012). Liu et al. (2011), for instance, investigated the relationship between transactional leadership and team innovativeness and found some positive organisational outcomes arising from transactional leadership which were conditionally bounded by emotional labour.

However, despite its apparent usefulness in understanding leadership styles, transactional leadership has been widely criticised. One of the major criticisms of transactional leadership lies in its possible enhancement of short-termism. Thus, Burns (1978) argues that the transactional leadership practices could result in followers' short-term relationships of exchange with the leader. As the follower's performance is tied to an exchange for a reward, there is no imperative for long term engagement and thus possibilities to easily change to alternative relationships that are deemed more rewarding. The transactional leadership relationships, as a result, tend to become 'shallow, temporary exchanges of gratification' (McCleskey, 2014, p. 122) often creating resentments between the participants.

Further, as a transactional leader is typically responsible for managing and guiding the system/institution within the framework of mission, vision and values of the organization (Bass, 1997), the leadership style is perceived as less active in encouraging the entrepreneurial or innovative aspects of followers/subordinates/employees (Deluga, 1990; Liu et al., 2011). This is particularly the case given the focus on employees' compliance with predetermined procedures. In addition, transactional leadership theory has been criticized for disregarding the situational and contextual factors that affect

organizations in proposing a one-size-fits-all universal approach to leadership theory construction (Beyer, 1999; McCleskey, 2014; Yukl, 2013; Yukl and Mahsud, 2010).

With particular reference to the education sector in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter Two), a country with its unique socio-cultural dimensions characterized by high power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity (Hofstede, 2003; Schwartz, 1994), it is envisaged that transactional leadership styles would be prevalent. However, Powell et al. (2008) argue that transactional leadership is more closely linked with stereotypical masculine characteristics. This has implications for, and thus relevance to, this study on female leadership in a country that is ranked high in masculinity. Further, transactional leadership is relevant in the context of female leadership as it highlights leadership as a management process especially with respect to management by exception. This is further supported by the wider reference to a leader as a manager in the Arabic world, Saudi Arabia included (see section 3.2.1).

Criticism of the application of transactional leadership styles in educational settings builds on the wider theoretical limitations. Agosto (2012), for instance, argues that the transactional leadership style puts emphasis on the bureaucracy and hierarchy of command, and thus, is formal in nature as it focuses on the functions, tasks and behaviour of each school actor/employee to deliver a service. However, the service offered could be inefficient due to the requirements of supporting these bureaucratic systems. In this respect, the management activities focus more on monitoring performance of routine exercises in order to satisfy organisational objectives rather than to chart a new direction for the institution. Further, because of the short-termist nature of this leadership style, the interactions in school settings between the head teachers and teachers is

likely to be episodic and for the purpose of exchange transaction only, which could affect the long-term performance of the schools (Bush, 2009). In addition, as the focus of teachers is drawn towards the benefits derivable from the transactional relationship, such that every opportunity to increase the rewards obtainable is utilized. Thus, Bush (2011) argues that teachers look for opportunities to benefit more from the transactions including rewards and other benefits, such as promotion and salary increments, as inducements in exchange for tasks assigned.

As discussed in section 2.5, nationwide policies and procedures for each school in Saudi Arabia are set at the ministerial level. One implication in understanding this leadership style in the context of female head teachers in Saudi Arabia is the extent to which these centralized rules and policies are followed to the letter regardless of inherent or identified ineffectiveness at school levels and also the extent to which the female head teachers have taken action to transform. This would be captured from the experiences of the head teachers in their leadership roles.

3.3.2 Transformational leadership

The model of transformational leadership, originated by Burns (1978), has been 'the single most studied and debated idea within the field of leadership' (Diaz-Saenz, 2011, p. 299), that aims to change and transforms people (Northouse, 2018). This process involves combining leaders' and followers' efforts in a relationship that is characterized by motivation, inspiration, devotion, morale and exceeding self-interests, in order to advance work that meets both the leaders and followers' needs (Barnett et al., 2001;

Bass, 1997). Thus, transformational leadership involves a collaboration between leaders and followers with the aim of reaching a higher level of morale and motivation (Burns, 1978). In this collaboration, individuals go beyond self-interest, as the leader 'inspires followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organization' (Khan and Varshney, 2013, p. 202). Thus, the leader engages with followers and creates a connection that increases motivation and confidence in the leader by the followers (Wilson, 2013). This type of relationship requires effective communication between the leaders and followers since the leaders do not necessarily have to lead from the front but can delegate responsibility to their teams (Bass, 1996; Metwally, 2014; Pastor and Mayo, 2006; Powell et al., 2008).

Bass (1990, p. 31) defines transformational leadership as 'how the leader affects followers, who are intended to trust, admire and respect the transformational leader' with the transformational leader being 'one who raises the followers' level of consciousness about the importance and value of desired outcomes and the methods of reaching those outcomes' (Burns, 1978, p. 141). In the same vein, Yukl (1989, p. 24) defines transformational leadership as 'the process of influencing major change in the attitudes and assumptions of organisational members and building commitment for the organization mission, objectives and strategies'. The transformational leaders engage followers to strive towards a common objective leaving their self-interests aside (Northouse, 2018). In order to influence the followers' commitment to and engagement with shared goals, transformation leaders use a combination of power sources. The different power sources include positional power, personal power, expert power and resource power (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010; French and Raven, 1959).

As the transformational relationship between the leaders and followers is characterized by motivation, devotion, inspiration and a transcendence of self-interests for the common good, the transformational leaders should have the ability to motivate and encourage intellectual stimulation (Avolio and Bass, 2004; Dvir et al., 2002; Pastor and Mayo, 2006) through inspiration and use of high performance standards. In this respect, transformational leadership 'integrates the elements of empathy, compassion, sensitivity, relationship building, and innovation' (Jin, 2010, p. 174). This is needed in order to gain the commitment deemed a moral imperative to achieve higher levels of accomplishment (Muijs, 2011). Burn (1978, p. 20) highlights that there is engagement 'with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality'.

Thus, Transformational leadership is based on the idea of changing followers' values so that they share the same goals and values of the organization (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Metwally, 2014) and have a new perspective on the roles they should play (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Therefore, unlike a transactional relationship, followers/employees achieve organisational goals, not because of the reward or praise but because these goals are consistent with their personal goals (Jin, 2010; MacKenzie et al., 2001). Thus, achieving the organisation's goals also fulfils the followers' needs.

With particular reference to educational settings, transformational leadership involves autonomy that allows for the establishment of school vision, goals, modelling best practices and allowing for participation in management (Gozukara and Simsek, 2015; Hughes and Silva, 2013). Many researchers associate transformational leadership with

female leaders rather than male leaders (Carless, 1998; Eagly et al., 2003; Yammarino et al., 1997). Studies show that women perceive themselves and are perceived by others to follow this leadership style owing to their natural qualities of nurturing and providing support (Bass et al., 1996; Brinia, 2012; Eagly et al., 2003; Rosener, 1990; Taki, 2006). For instance, Taki (2006) in comparing leadership styles based on gender argues that 'men tend to adopt transactional leadership, which is expressed with a system of penalties and punishments… On the contrary, women adopt the transformational leadership model, a leadership that is not static, allows collegial solutions, encourages participation, information and power distribution' (p. 345). This suggests that there are masculine and feminine ways of leading (see section 3.6). However, some researchers (e.g. Blackmore, 2005; Lambert, 2007; Mills et al., 2004; Skelton, 2002) disagree with this notion arguing that there has been a 're-masculinization of leadership through leadership ideals such as transformational leadership' suggesting a masculine framework for effective leadership in schools (Lambert, 2007, quoted in Niesche, 2011, p. 53).

Empirical research on the effects of transformational leadership in schools suggests a positive impact on school conditions including planning, policies and procedures (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999) as well as teacher commitment towards school reform (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2003). McCarley et al. (2016) in their study on transformational leadership and school climate found that there is a correlation between transformational leadership and the supportive, engaged and frustrated elements of a school's climate. School climate is one of the most important factors that contributes to the performance and success of a school (Cohen et al., 2008; Hoyle et al., 1985; Stover, 2005). It essentially reflects the beliefs that both teachers and students hold regarding

their school (Stover, 2005; Tableman, 2004) and thus, as a transformational leader, head teachers must create a school climate that is conducive to change (Engels et al., 2008). McCarley et al.'s (2016) findings were consistent with other studies that showed that transformational leadership has an impact on school performance (e.g. Eshbach and Henderson, 2010; Mooney, 2003; Sarros et al., 2008). Further, with respect to a supportive national context, Wright (2007) shows that transformational leadership is largely successful in United Kingdom (UK) educational settings because of the support from institutions such as the National College for Teaching and Leadership (which has now been replaced by the Teaching Regulatory Agency) and a more democratic environment in the educational sector. Whilst the UK educational sector could be described as democratic, this is hardly the case in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 2) which raises implications with crucial relevance to this study. Thus, based on the female head teachers' leadership experiences, an understanding is obtained on how the national context could have affected any specific school level transformation.

Further, whereas this leadership style is seen to be associated with female leaders in other sectors (Eagly, 2003; Metcalfe, 2006; Taki, 2006; Valentine and Prater, 2011), in the educational sector, there is still limited research to suggest that female head teachers are inclined to follow a transformational leadership style. Regardless of gender differentiation, the transformational leadership style is popular with educators as 'it helps empower instructors, gives them hope, optimism and energy, as it defines the mission of how to accomplish goals' (Leithwood, 1992 quoted in Litz and Scott, 2017).

Although transformational leaders might seem more independent and progressive, this leadership style has also received its share of criticism. It is seen as being the means for leaders to manipulate and dominate their followers (Leithwood, 2010; Mullins, 2007; Northouse, 2018), as there is a danger of unidirectional influence which 'makes the followers more susceptible to deception' (Mullins, 2007, p. 383). Transformational leadership, from a Foucauldian perspective, assumes that followers are without agency and they exist to be directed by the leaders (Northouse, 2018; Wilson, 2013). The leader, on the other hand, assumes a 'holy' position and a vital force endowed with exceptional endowment to change followers' beliefs, values and reality (Mullins, 2007; Yukl, 1999). As such, Wilson (2013) argues that followers are merely passive consumers of transformational leadership where their true capacity cannot be realized without their leader's intervention. Transformational leadership fosters a heroic leadership bias which has detrimental effects such as blind trust and autocratic behaviour enhancement (Northouse, 2018; Shamir, 1995; Yukl, 1999). Hence, within an educational context, this leadership style is likely to suffer from the problem of a 'hero' leader (Niesche, 2011, p. 51) whose departure from the school, for instance, would lead to a decline within the school.

Further, due to the 'heroic' nature of the leader and the inherent requirement of follower trust/obedience, this leadership style may encourage bureaucracy. Leithwood (2010) argues that in an effort to achieve swift obedience, transformational leaders may turn to subjugate subordinates who furnish contrary opinions even though their views may be more beneficial to achieve school aims. Thus, there is a potential danger of authoritarian disposition in transformation leadership since an '(unethical) pseudo-transformational leader may behave like a transformational leader and the unethical or

immoral side of the pseudo-transformational leader only emerges at a later stage' (Lee, 2014, p. 20). It may be that in their quest for power, charisma and transcendence, transformational leaders may devote considerable time and vigour in impression management instead of industrious execution of required duties and functions (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Consequently, instead of achieving transformation, a transformational leader may exercise expedience over collective good of their followers as well as that of the educational institution (Niesche, 2014). Hence, before crediting transformational leadership styles with the position of a saviour for educational institutions, there is a need to acknowledge and highlight these inherent dangers (see section 3.4 also).

Another criticism of transformational leadership lies in the leader's unshaken insight into decision making. As a source of knowledge, excellence and objectivity, the transformational leader is viewed as an ethical, fair and truthful individual who continuously strives to achieve the best interests of others (Wilson, 2013). This may inevitably lead to an overestimation of the quality and value of decisions undertaken by transformational leaders who may indeed be 'fatally out of touch with reality' (Tourish, 2013, p. 87). A consequence of this shortcoming may lead to disconnected centralised decision making which may hinder transformation at local levels. Such a limitation of transformational leadership has been observed in the United Kingdom where the government uses the rhetoric of transformation to implement its centralized policies in schools (Bush, 2011). Further, as Bottery (2001, p. 215) argues, in practice, this leadership style is 'a more centralized, more directed, and more controlled educational system (that) has dramatically reduced the possibility of realizing a genuinely transformational education and leadership'.

Several studies have shown that transformational leadership is becoming popular in some parts of the Middle East, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as the region seeks more development and change in education (Khan and Varshney, 2013; Litz and Scott, 2017; Shahin and Wright, 2004; Sheikh et al., 2013). However, it is argued that socio-cultural factors would be an important factor in determining the efficiency of this leadership style in the educational settings in these countries where the culture is quite different from that of the West (Litz and Scott, 2017). Thus, a limitation of implementing transformational leadership in the case of Saudi Arabia would be that educators in the country would view effective leadership based on this style through a different cultural lens. The importance of understanding this leadership style in this study on female head teachers in secondary schools lies, first, in the perceived strong link between female leadership and transformational leadership theory (Bass et al., 1996; Brinia, 2012; Eagly et al., 2003; Rosener, 1990; Taki, 2006). Secondly, given the socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia, the application of this leadership style would be affected by these socio-cultural forces.

Therefore, understanding transformational theories of leadership provides the background to understanding transformational female leadership in the case of female Saudi Arabian head teachers and how this could be affected by socio-cultural factors. Knowledge of this leadership style helps interpret the female head teachers' leadership styles, their reasons for using the chosen styles and factors that could have impacted their use of the leadership style.

3.3.3 Managerial Leadership

The managerial leadership style, also known as formal leadership, has some overlaps in characteristics with transactional leadership style (Bass and Bass, 2009; Dimmock and Walker, 2005; McCleskey, 2014; Northouse, 2018). This leadership style places emphasis on a leader's position and the organisation's hierarchy of command (Agosto, 2012; Yukl, 2013). Thus, the authority and influence of the leadership is allocated to 'formal positions in proportion to the status of those positions in the organisational hierarchy' (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 14). Thus, a position gives authority to the person to command and enforce obedience on the subordinates. This focus on organisational hierarchy essentially promotes bureaucracy within organisations (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Northouse, 2018).

Managerial leadership, therefore, can be described as both bureaucratic and hierarchical in nature supporting the proposition that 'social systems work best with a clear channel of command' (Powell and Tahan, 2018, p. 12). As such, structures and procedures are considered very important within this leadership style, as it emphasises the technical and functional aspects of leadership (Bass and Bass, 2009; Northouse, 2018). Accordingly, Leithwood et al. (1999, p. 14) argue that the 'focus of leaders ought to be on functions, tasks and behaviours and that if these functions are carried out competently the work of others in the organisation will be facilitated'. This perspective has the implied assumption that organisational members are largely rational (Bass and Bass, 2009; Leithwood et al., 1999; Northouse, 2018).

With particular reference to educational settings, schools are envisaged to be run by strict rules and targets under this leadership style (Agosto, 2012; Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Thus, the focus of the head teachers using this leadership style is on the functions, tasks and behaviours of the subordinates necessary to achieve institutional goals (Bennett and Anderson, 2003; Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Leithwood et al., 1999; West-Burnham, 2011). Each subordinate has an important role to play in the overall success of the school and thus, a managerial leader should have the ability to co-ordinate and control the subordinates for the overall success of the institution (Bennett and Anderson, 2003; West-Burnham, 2011).

Crucially, the managerial leader focuses on the maintenance of a system and thus 'puts great effort into planning and organizing the day-to-day operations of the school' (Bennett and Anderson, 2003, p. 14). The management activities are meant to oversee the performance of routine exercises to satisfaction, rather than chart a new direction for the institution (Bennett and Anderson, 2003; Bush, 2007; Dressler, 2001; Leithwood et al., 1999). The managerial leaders' priority is on managing the existing activities successfully instead of developing new visions/strategies for a better future for their schools (Bush, 2007). Dressler (2001, p. 175) highlights the significance of managerial leadership in schools, particularly that 'traditionally, the principal's role has been clearly focused on management responsibilities'. Further, Bush (2007) argues that this leadership style is suitable for school establishments as these styles are more effective in centralised systems. This is particularly the case in Saudi Arabia's education system (see section 2.5). In a centralised system, the managerial leader is accountable to a centralised authority that may be higher in the hierarchy than the school-level stakeholders. The suitability of this leadership style in a centralised system is that it

enables the prioritization of an efficient implementation of external requirements from higher levels within a bureaucratic hierarchy (Bennett and Anderson, 2003; Bush, 2007; McLennan and Thurlow, 2003).

Several studies have shown that the bureaucratic and hierarchical characteristics, associated with the managerial leadership style, are very prominent in educational settings (Agosto, 2012; Bennett and Anderson, 2003; Bush, 2007; Dressler, 2001; Kok and McDonald, 2017; McLennan and Thurlow, 2003; Meyer, 2002; Williams, 2017). Whilst this leadership style promotes hierarchical and bureaucratic structures, its appropriateness for the educational systems that are still highly centralized has some support (Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Leithwood et al., 1999; West-Burnham, 2011). Agosto (2012), for instance, argues that the managerial leadership style is a good fit for a highly bureaucratic education system that has a top-down decision-making structure, whilst Bennett and Anderson (2003) contend that despite a perceived anathema of hierarchical and bureaucratic structures in these postmodern times, such diligence is necessary within the education system. The managerial leadership style in schools easily aligns with a governmental 'standards and accountability' approach (Agosto, 2012; Dimmock and Walker, 2005; West-Burnham et al., 2007), which favours the continued usage of this leadership style. Importantly, achieving functioning schools for learning is an essential requirement which requires 'calm and orderly schools and classrooms' (Bush, 2007, p. 396) that managerial leadership enhances.

However, several criticisms of this leadership style exist, including its continued appropriateness to educational settings. Notably, the leadership style has been criticized for not promoting, and thus reducing, the professional role of teachers (West-Burnham

et al., 2007). The hierarchical aspect promoted by this leadership style, whilst suitable for institutions such as the armed forces, which depend on tight disciplines for their effectiveness, is largely unsuitable for educational institutions which have a large number of professional staff (Bush, 2010; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005; West-Burnham et al., 2007). The educational institutions depend on decisions made by individuals and subunits which require a great deal of professional judgment (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005). Thus, as this leadership style focuses on the organization as an entity, it largely ignores or underestimates the contribution of individuals (Bush, 2010). This essentially hinders the professionalism of staff through greatly underestimating individual contributions, thereby producing an inaccurate portrayal of schools and colleges (Greenfield, 1973; Bush, 2010).

Further, this leadership style is perceived as most appropriate in stable conditions where institutions can employ less complex and more centralized structures (Bush, 2010). However, this assumption is unrealistic, as evidenced by several studies that highlight the rapid and multiple changes affecting the educational system in most countries (Bush, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2009; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005; Mulford, 2003; Northouse, 2018), Saudi Arabia included. Mulford (2003), for instance, showed that the role and impact of teachers on school effectiveness is rapidly changing which makes this leadership style inappropriate for schools to adapt. Owens and Shakeshaft (1992, p. 4) amply summarise that ‘rationalistic-bureaucratic notions have largely proven to be sterile and to have little application to administrative practice in the real world’.

The relevance of understanding this leadership style in the case of this study is that in the context of the highly centralised educational system in Saudi Arabia (see chapter two), the Ministry of Education deploys a flat managerial structure in schools in order to coordinate and monitor the educational system centrally (Alzaidi, 2008; MoE, 2017; Mathis, 2010; Ostrosky, 2015). Thus, the centralised educational system, by implication, supports the bureaucratic and hierarchical leadership style of managerial leadership. The hierarchical and bureaucratic structure also inherently supports the socio-cultural fabric of the country characterised by high power distance, uncertainty avoidance and high masculinity (Alzaidi, 2008; Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993; Hofstede, 1991). This has particular implications for female leadership, as the underlying socio-cultural forces behind the leadership style may not favour or may hinder female leadership. In this respect, the interest of this study is to interpret and gain an understanding of the female head teachers' experiences with respect to such a hierarchical, bureaucratic and centralised system. Through the female head teachers' experiences, a better understanding of how such systems could be transformed to promote female leadership might be conceived.

Further, with an understanding of the other possible leadership styles (e.g. transformational and transactional), which are highly based on western values and culture, the alternative possibilities that they offer could also be evaluated, considering the unique socio-political-cultural context that has been depicted in life experiences.

3.4 A critique of traditional approaches in leadership studies and implications for research

Whilst the three leadership styles discussed in section 3.3 above have their own criticisms, the whole approach to how leadership is studied has also attracted critique. The general criticism mainly arises from the overall acritical perspectives adopted in the study of leadership (Collinson et al., 2018; Tourish, 2013; Vince and Mazen, 2014; Wilson, 2013). This non-critical approach in leadership studies has been argued from different angles.

Among the critiques of leadership studies is the seemingly continued 'romanticising' of leadership in the leadership theories (Collinson et al., 2018; Meindl et al., 1985) which recognises mostly (if not only) the positive engagement with leaders. According to Collinson et al. (2018, p. 4), romanticised leadership:

> invites only positive engagement from readers, scholars and practitioners from within the particular concept of leadership offered. It asks that one consumes and relates to leadership in a way that assumes a positive and natural absolute: the status to be attained is simply leadership, rather than there being such a thing as good and bad leadership practice.

Basically, the romanticising of leadership fosters a naturalistic privileging of the status of leaders, often portraying them as possessing the 'imaginative and heroic capabilities to access transcendent natural truth' (Collinson et al., 2018, p. 4). As argued in section 3.3.2, there is often a heroic inclination attributed to leaders, particularly when there

is organisational success. This results in a tendency to exaggerate leaders' contributions and to treat leadership as a causal and explanatory category. The effect is that leaders are excessively credited for high organisational performance or charged overly for poor performance. This perspective largely ignores the aspect that the overall contribution of leaders to collective efforts is much more constrained and closely tied to external factors outside a leader's control. The relevance of this understanding to this study is that the extent to which the female Saudi Arabian head teachers perceive themselves as key contributors to school successes (or failure) could be judged from expressions in their experiences as school leaders. This critical approach is also relevant in conceiving the extent to which more power diffusion to school levels could have a potential dysfunctional effect (see below).

Further, because of a privileged status of leaders (school leaders in this study), power asymmetries may increase with the resultant substitution of critique with an expressive contribution to the absolute (Collinson et al*.,* 2018). From this view, leadership may be perceived as 'natural' and therefore, beyond criticism rather than as a socially-constructed phenomena. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the socio-cultural context would then exacerbate such perceptions. Given the gendered socio-cultural structure of Saudi Arabia, it would be interesting to understand, from the position of head teachers, the extent to which they perceive their leadership position as some form of a 'privileged status' and indeed whether power issues actually arise. In this context, is it possible that female head teachers may perceive their leadership position such that this manifests itself in some 'expressive harmonious collectives' (Murphy and Roberts, 2004, p. 45) where unitary groups are regularly required to regurgitate their trust in the leadership?

Alternatively, it is possible too that the leadership positions may not carry the appropriate power that privilege the position at school levels but beyond (e.g. at the centralized ministerial levels).

Continuing to be critical of leadership studies, another critique arises from the dominance of a leader-centric conceptions of leadership (Wilson, 2013). What is often portrayed of a leader is that of a 'masculine ideal in the very prime of life, comprising a well-honed, mature strength of body, mind and soul…There is no weakness, no flaw, not even the merest hint of the feminine, the old, the weak, the vulnerable or the damaged in this account of the ideal leader. The leader is presented as a superior being, yet humility, modesty and an understanding of the limitations of other people is also expected, for it is they who are said to be in such great need of his guidance.' (Wilson, 2013, p. 49). This is leader-centric with a focus on leader attributions (Collinson et al., 2018). Thus, Wilson (2013) argues that socio-cultural factors and historical context have a far greater impact on leadership and leadership knowledge. This study contributes in a critical position in challenging this 'masculine ideal' of leadership by focusing on female head teachers. The socio-cultural factors that contribute to the construction of female leadership are of interest and thus, this study contributes to Wilson's (2013) call for consideration of these factors. However, by not incorporating the views of subordinates, it falls short of the leader-centric critique on another front.

In the leader-centric theories such as transformational leadership (see section 3.3.2), a leader is perceived as more fully and formally characterized as a charismatic individual with high levels of 'self confidence and self-esteem' (Bass, 1985, p. 45), capable of

defining priorities and meaning in a manner which others find persuasive. The importance in this study on female leadership could be the extent, for instance, to which female head teachers portray themselves as self-confident and with high self-esteem. The leader is portrayed as someone motivated to inspire others through emotional appeals and intellectual stimulation and concerned also with individual follower's needs, views and development (Bass, 1985). Within this conception, a leader acts by connecting with the needs of others, satisfying the leader's own needs in the process of satisfying the needs of others (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

On the opposite, because of this leader-centric focus, followers are portrayed in this discourse as persons with unmet needs and unrealized potential (Wilson, 2013). According to this proposition, in order to address the gaps in the follower's lives essentially requires the intervention of the leader (Burns, 1978) as followers may not fully understand their own true needs and hence the leader is to be the one who can reveal these to them (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). This perspective essentially diminishes the position of followers as:

> deeply flawed persons in this discourse, existing primarily as a problem, as beings of limited capacity and potential. Followers are portrayed as persons with inherent and inescapable limitations, producing a need for intervention which is to be provided by the leader (Wilson, 2013, p. 49).

Thus, within the context of transformational leadership, there is implied the state of continuous dependency of the followers on the leader in which 'they pass over key aspects of their selves and their lives to leaders' (Wilson, 2013, p. 50) with the leader's

self-expression realized through followers' self-denial. However, there is also an assumption that the leaders are dependent, as they have to express themselves through achieving change in followers. This creates some ambiguity which entwines leaders and followers in a dynamic where success implies the possibility of mutual extinction (Wilson, 2013). The relevant aspect to this study could relate to the perceptions of the Saudi Arabian female head teachers regarding their followers and the extent to which they are able to institute some level of change through them. However, this proposition might be interesting to observe given that any form of leadership (see section 3.3) requires some source of power. As such, the conceptions of leadership are considered in the context of the Saudi Arabian socio-political and cultural aspects.

Further, in the dominant leadership theories, there is a danger that subordinates/followers' individual autonomy and responsibility on matters relating to reality, values and beliefs may seemingly be pushed aside in the claims that leaders can and should change followers' perceptions of these matters for a common goal. This assumption, however, is akin to leaders maintaining the dominant social values and norms of the time (Wilson, 2013). This can never always be in the interest of followers. The relevance to this study of such a conception is on whether the female head teachers can be perceived as agents who reinforce existing social values and norms that privilege a more masculine society in Saudi Arabia or create opportunities to changing inhibiting social structures.

In summary, the key arguments advanced from a critical perspective are that though leadership is frequently undertaken in a hostile or unstable work environment, this is largely covered up with positivity or a focus on mostly the positive aspect, basically a

romanticised position (Collinson et al., 2018; Vince and Mazen, 2014). Leadership is also often informed by strategies that create relations of dependence and domination (Everett, 2002) and becomes inseparable from the exercise and experience of power (Collinson, 2014). In short, all theories on leadership are subject to different power sources, whether actually in existence or implied. Power in leadership could have a double-edged effect and thus, the extent to which Saudi Arabian female head teachers may request for more power (autonomy) could be counteracted with the potential dysfunctional effects that could arise.

The implication of these critiques on leadership studies, in general, is that it needs to change. Thus, Tourish (2013, p. 7) argues that leadership theory has 'done much to encourage an overemphasis on leadership and, in some cases, has legitimised the actions of megalomaniac leaders, who have become convinced that the powerful, visionary leadership is helpful, healthy and wise – and, of course, that this means more power should be ceded to leaders'. Transformational leadership, for instance, is complicit in its attempt to extend the power of organisational leaders in ever more intrusive directions, with influence conceived in unidirectional terms. The very essence of it seems to be the enhancing of the power of some whilst diminishing that of others. What is needed is more 'critical leadership studies' (Collinson, 2014) that develop alternatives to leader-centric and post-heroic perspectives. This critical leadership approach challenges the tendency to 'simply reproduce and reinforce the power of leaders without sufficiently considering the potential for the abuse of power that invariably arises' (Tourish, 2013, p. 21).

This has implications specifically to this study on female education leadership in Saudi Arabia. In particular, taking a non-critical approach to analysis would be perceived as promoting the status quo which reinforces existing social structures and processes. In order for research to have some emancipatory effect, understanding the underlying forces/factors that sustain existing social structures/mechanism is important to which a critical approach contributes. This approach also facilitates understanding of leadership as a 'fluid, unstable phenomenon' (Wilson, 2013, p, 43). This critical approach also entails the taking into account the socio-cultural factors and historical context which have greater impact on leadership. These are important aspects as they influence the social construct of leadership. Arguably too, a study like this one which examines female leadership in a highly gendered society, investigating how gender constructs affect leadership, is inherently critical. This is because it goes outside the dominant 'masculine' leadership literature. The next section discusses social constructionism theory.

3.5 Social Constructionism Theory

This study sought to explore the way in which the social construct of head teachers' gender impacted upon their leadership. This is achieved through a life history approach, which captures the female head teachers' life journeys and leadership experiences. This approach is appropriate as it allows the situation of 'participants' lives in the wider political, economic, social and educational context' (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016, p. 212), which furthers understanding of their experiences, as well as their values and beliefs. In this context, my research approach will help to highlight how the social construct of gender affected the female head teachers' early childhood, university life

and early career experiences and finally their headship experiences. The aim is to find out from the head teachers' own recollections how their gender orientation affected their journey to leadership, along with their leadership practices and experiences, given the socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia in general and the peculiarities of its education system. The central theme, therefore, is how society's construction of gender impacts upon female head teachers' journey to leadership. Since gender, like other social identities, is socially constructed (Blackmore and Kenway, 2017; Diller, 2018; Haslanger, 2018; Klenke, 2017), I have adopted a social constructionist perspective in my research. The key tenets of social constructionist theory are discussed next, followed by a focus on socially constructed concept of gender, this being particularly relevant for my research.

3.5.1 Defining Social Constructionism

There is no single definition or description that could possibly capture all the aspects of social constructionism (Burr, 2015; Hosking and McNamee, 2006; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). In this respect, any approach that adopts one or more of the key assumptions of the theory could be labelled as social constructionist (Gergen, 1985). Thus, the focus should be on describing the key propositions of social constructionism to which the various definitions in the literature would fall into. Accordingly, social constructionism could rightly be defined as a general term 'sometimes applied to theories that emphasise the socially created nature of social life' (Oxford Index, 2018). Nonetheless, Gergen's (1985, p. 265) definition of social constructionism as a 'perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences' has been widely quoted in the literature.

3.5.2 Propositions of Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is predicated on the proposition that the social world is constructed by individuals themselves through their social practices (Cassell and Symon, 2004; Subramaniam 2014). As such, this social world is not fixed nor is it external to individuals since individuals create the reality (Burr, 2015). This socially constructed reality is therefore being constantly reproduced by people's representations of it (Cassell and Symon, 2004). Essentially, people are perceived as part of their environments and through their social interactions contribute to 'the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face' (Weick, 1995, p. 31). Further, according to social constructionism, people construct their knowledge of the world through their daily interactions (Burr, 2015; Schwandt, 2000). Thus, knowledge and truth are created through the social interactions, not discovered by the mind (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Burr (2015, p. 5) argues that these social interactions 'between people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices during which our shared versions of knowledge are constructed'. Further, social constructionism challenges us to be ever-critical of our suppositions about how the world appears to be (Burr, 2015; Steedman, 2000). For instance, the categorization of human beings as men and women could be questioned as to whether it is simply a reflection of naturally occurring distinct types of human being or a reflection of social constructs.

However, these 'natural categories may be inevitably bound up with gender, the normative prescriptions of masculinity and femininity in a culture, so that these categories of personhood have been built upon them' (Burr, 2015, p. 3). Thus, social construc-

tionism posits that characteristics typically thought to be immutable and solely biological (such as gender, race, class, ability, sexuality) are products of human definition and interpretation, shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Burr, 2015; Schwandt, 2000; Subramaniam 2014). In this respect, the ways in which we commonly understand the world, including the categories and concepts that are used, are historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2015). Thus, all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative which essentially portrays people as relational beings (Gergen, 2001). This means that an individual's understanding of the world should be perceived as historically and culturally situated, which changes across time and space (Young and Collin, 2004). These ways of understanding are thus, not only 'specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are products of that culture and history, dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time' (Burr, 2015, p. 4).

In this respect, one of the key postulations of social constructionism relates to the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge. This has implications, for instance, when looking at concepts as interpreted from either a 'western' or 'non-western' (such as Arab countries) settings. Studies have shown the differences that exist in people's understanding of concepts such as gender across different cultures (e.g. Adya, 2008; Chandra, 2012; Brabazon and Murray, 2010; Frieze et al., 2012). For instance, Adya's (2008) study highlighted the differences that exist between western and South Asian women's interpretations of gender discrimination in the workplace and found that whilst the American (western) women had identified gender stereotyping and discrim-

ination in their workplace, the South Asian women had not identified any 'genderisation'. In this respect, individuals' interpretations are historically and culturally influenced.

Further, another postulation of social constructionism is that knowledge is sustained by social processes (Burr, 2015; Cassell and Symon, 2004; Schwandt, 2000). Thus, people construct the knowledge of the world through their daily interactions (Burr, 2015; Schwandt, 2000) and also sustain this knowledge through social processes. In this regard, social constructionism emphasises the role of social processes. Thus, Cromby and Nightingale (1999) argue that the people we are and the world around us are essentially a product of social processes. These social processes determine who we are and also how we perceive the world at large. Therefore, our values, practices and structures of meaning are perceived as socially constructed. As these aspects are products of the social processes, there is a need to take a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge about the world by understanding the processes through which this knowledge is perceived as natural (Burr, 2015; Fernando, 2012). Savickas et al. (2009) argue that different objects and events in societies are perceived in a certain way by the inhabitants of that society. The understanding of these objects and events are sustained over time by social processes to become the reality for the individuals within that social setting. With particular reference to gender, for instance, a social constructionist perspective is that this is socially constructed rather than biologically determined (Lorber, 2010).

Thus, gender is perceived as a 'human invention, like language, kinship, religion, and technology; like them, gender organizes human social life in culturally patterned ways'

(Lorber, 1994, p. 6). Gender has been used to organize social relations in everyday life as well as in major social structures (Lorber, 1994; Szell and Thurner, 2013) such as social class (Brine, 2006; Hoskins, 2010; Reay, 2006) and the hierarchies of bureaucratic organizations (Acker, 2006; Blackmore, 2017; Heilman, 2001). Lorber (2010) argues that gender has become so pervasive in our everyday life that questioning it is taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions is viewed as irrational.

However, 'gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interactions, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life' (Lorber, 1994, p. 13). This gender construction usually starts from the time that individuals are assigned to a socially agreed gender category (male or female) based on their genital organs at birth (Lorber, 2010). Once assigned to this socially agreed gender category, individuals in one gender category are treated differently from those in the other category (Subramaniam 2014). From childhood, the individuals in one gender category behave differently in response to the differential treatments received (Lorber, 1994). The differential treatment could be seen in many societies, for instance, where it (is) was common practice that male members used to do outdoor work such as farming, fighting in wars and running governments, whereas the female members used to manage domestic labour and raising children. This was perceived as the natural roles of the genders. Thus, society created its own reality about the gender roles which was certainly something not factual (Connell, 2014). This gender construction affects the entire life of a person, having implications for expectations and experiences at different stages, and shaping life experiences (Burr, 2015). Lorber (1994), for instance, highlights that:

> Parenting is gendered, with different expectations for mothers and for fathers, and people of different genders work at different kinds of jobs. The work adults do as mothers and fathers and as low-level workers and high-

> level bosses, shapes women's and men's life experiences, and these experiences produce different feelings, consciousness, relationships, skills – ways of being that we call feminine or masculine (p. 14)

Therefore, given that every aspect of one's life is gendered, this has implications for my study on female leadership in Saudi Arabia. I would like to find out the experiences of the female head teachers, especially the extent to which their gender construct shaped their expectations and experiences throughout their lives. This is critical, as Bem (1983) argues that in a society where gender is so powerful a 'schema', one must wage a constant, active battle not to fall into typical gendered attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, from the head teachers' life experiences, I would be able to understand what it (might) takes to overcome the gender barriers to finally become a leader, or simply as Hoskins (2010) puts it, what is 'the price of success?' for leadership in a highly gendered society.

Further, in this construction of social identities through social interactions, language plays an important role (Burr, 2015; Elder-Vass, 2012). Thus, some highly valued attributes/traits in western societies such as honesty, pride, modesty, resilience (Leary, 2005) are learned through language. Similarly, some social traits such as loyalty, the importance of family roles, privacy, hospitality and modesty (Minkov and Hofstede, 2014) become available to us through language. We learn these societal values or traits upon entry to this world and are also compelled to perceive or understand ourselves, including our interactions with others, in terms of these concepts.

Another postulation of social constructionism is that the construction of knowledge, through social interactions, is perceived as a negotiated process where certain interpretations are privileged over others (Burr, 2015; Parker, 1998). Thus, in the construction of knowledge, some constructed claims will be seen as more truthful than others, which, Burr (2015) argues, can also vary in relation to specific cultures. According to Hosking and Morley (2004, p. 5) 'people negotiate how they are willing to describe their world, given that they are motivated both to find a common language and to find descriptions that favour themselves or their own reference groups'.

However, whilst the negotiated process results in some rationalised concepts that determine what counts as reason for particular beliefs, claims and intentions (Brandom, 2000), individuals end up privileging some of these beliefs, claims or intentions over others. According to Burr (2015), some practical conditions of life sometimes provide a suitable grounding for the sustenance of particular common-sense views prevailing at any one time. These negotiated common-sense views may become available culturally and thus at the disposal of powerful groups to advance their interests (Lyng, 2010). The danger of these privileged interpretations could potentially become worse when justified by religious and cultural productions or even backed by law (Lorber, 2010). With particular reference to gender, it has been argued that the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is when the process is made invisible, such that any possible alternatives are virtually unthinkable (Lorber, 1994; Foucault, 1972; Gramsci, 1971). With the invisibility, the less powerful group easily accepts the status quo as natural or given, with less room to challenge the course of thinking. Gender scholars (e.g. Acker, 2006; Gatrell, 2010; Lyng, 2010; McGuire, 2002) have argued that the social representation of women as relational beings and the

main nurturers in their households due to the biological substratum of giving birth to children (Gilligan, 1982) has been successfully used by men to sustain their privileged positions in organisations.

Further, social constructionism postulates that knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 2015). According to this proposition, any event has alternative versions with corresponding actions. However, with several actions available, certain actions will be given preference and alternatives marginalised depending on the prevailing version of knowledge. Thus, Berger and Luckmann (1991, p. 35) argue that 'among the multiple realities there is one that presents itself as the reality *par excellence*. This is the reality of everyday life' (emphasis in original). Therefore, in the constructions of these realities, some patterns of social action are sustained whilst others are excluded (Burr, 2015). In other words, considering the possible multiple realities and social actions, individuals will have to commit themselves to lines of action in situations that may involve mixed motives (Hosking and Morley, 2004).

Further, the social actions for the knowledge acquired are inherently ambiguous and require interpretation. However, this interpretation will usually be from a particular (partisan) point of view. With particular reference to gender and leadership, for example, the promotion of particular points of view could be seen in defining leadership styles. For instance, when leadership is defined in terms of traits such as aggressiveness and risk taking, this inevitably perceives leaders as possessing traits that are part of a masculine stereotype, thus associating the leadership style with masculinity, and thereby marginalizing non-masculine leadership styles commonly associated with women. From my discussion in section 3.3 above, the leadership style that has been

most strongly linked with women in the literature is transformational leadership (Bass et al., 1996; Brinia, 2012; Eagly et al., 2003; Rosener, 1990; Taki, 2006).

Further, Bolton and Muzio (2007) argue that the social construct of women as feminine requires that women in organisational settings perform femininity rather than masculinity, which subliminally precludes them from core work processes in the organization, or restricting them to lower or non-transactional roles, such as entertaining clients. Bolton and Muzio (2007, p. 53) have found that masculinity is forged around terms such as 'expertise, rationality, control, predictability and commitment' (in the legal sector), terms with which men identify, whilst denying any qualities associated with the feminine. In this respect, the dominant knowledge has implications on the social actions, influencing what we can do and what we should do, for instance, on leadership styles and gender association.

However, social actors are not usually conscious of the influence of dominant meanings, nor do they acknowledge the existence of alternative meanings. Moreover, the dominant knowledge and social action can also vary between different cultures and historical time periods too as highlighted above. Further, these dominant interpretations may become firmly entwined with social practices over time, such that they end up being assumed as an objective reality by individuals who experience them (McLeod, 1997).

Whilst social processes create and sustain these dominant perspectives, these positions are not immutable to change (Burr, 2015). Through the same social interactions that ended up creating the dominant interpretations, less dominant or marginalised voices

can arise to challenge the dominant views. This partly explains the rise in feminism in the 21st century, with 'fourth wave' feminism starting around 2012 (Cochrane, 2013; Williams and Dempsey, 2010). Further, there is an increasing exposure of both gender invisibility and gender denial in research (Bassi et al., 2016; Lewis and Simpson, 2012; Smith et al., 2016). There are also increasing cases of women getting to top management positions through demonstrated superior technical knowledge (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Kalysh et al., 2016; Simpson et al., 2010). However, progress in advancing gender issues varies across cultures and nations.

In addition, social constructionism postulates that individuals continuously construct the social world through their actions. The constructed social world becomes the reality to which individuals must respond (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). The social world can be perceived as the product and human beings as the producers. However, the product created, which becomes the reality, has a subsequent influence on the producer. Crucially, social constructionism posits that the relationship that exists between the producer and the product is, and remains, a dialectical one. According to Berger and Luckman (1991, p. 78) 'man and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer. In this regard, 'society is a human product, society is an objective reality and man is a social product' (ibid). The implication of this continuing dialectical process, which requires the three essential characteristics of the social world (externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation) is that transformation or change of the created social world becomes inherently difficult as the objectivated social world has been retrojected into consciousness and seen as a normal way of life.

However, that does not mean that the social world cannot be changed. Rather, this change process takes time and is usually visible in a new generation. Thus, social constructionism posits that the social world can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Luckmann, 2013), but this process takes time as the dominant understandings are often intricately engraved into the existing social arrangements to the point that challenging these understandings results in resistance.

Further, the groups in society occupying a privileged position are innately threatened by any transformation and thus resist or fight back (Burr, 2015). Hence in a gendered social world where men occupy a privileged position (Stone, 2007), resistance to change could be both visible and invisible. In patriarchal societies like Saudi Arabia, the men occupy privileged positions in cultural, educational, academic and other aspects (Abalkhail, 2017; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). Therefore, suggestions or ideas which are perceived as distorting this social world-construct are bound to be strongly resisted. Sidani et al. (2015), for instance, highlighted the influence of patriarchal ideology within the workplace (in Lebanon) which resulted in a tendency to favour males over females as a major obstacle to women's access to leadership. This has implications on my study which focuses on members of the perceived less dominant social group (female head teachers) in their journeys to leadership in a highly patriarchal society.

3.5.3 Gender and Social Constructionism

Studies on gender usually centre on three main aspects: the notion of gender as central and relevant to understanding all social relations, institutions and processes; how gender relations constitute a problem as they are characterised by patterns of domination/subordination, inequalities, oppression and oppositions; and, gender relations are seen as social constructions (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Giddens (1989, p. 158) defines sex as 'biological or anatomical differences between men and women' and gender as 'concerning the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females'. These two terms underlie the distinctive theories which have been used to explain gender-related issues, the bio-evolutionary theory and the social constructionist theory (Durkin, 1997; Graves and Powell, 2003). According to the biological perspective, the distinction is made between male and female based on sex, and thus gender is perceived to be an inherent characteristic of the individual (Acker, 1992; Berger and Luckmann, 1995; Durkin, 1997). The importance of this biological distinction with respect to the social constructivist perspective is that it constitutes the beginning of gendered roles in human societies (see section 3.5.2).

In this study, I define the term 'gender' as a socially constructed category based on sex but referring to the social distinctions drawn between men and women, as opposed to the biologically defined category referred to as 'sex'. Acker (1992, p. 250) defines gender as the 'patterned, socially produced, distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine'. Thus, 'gender', as I use it in this study, refers to the socially constructed attributes or traits which tend to be attributed to each sex (Acker, 1992; Coates, 1998; Wodak, 1997). It refers to the socially constructed distinction between

female and male which is also seen in the distinction between femininity and masculinity. Alvesson and Billing (2009) argue that gender is a key concept for understanding what is happening to individuals in their (working) lives. It helps to understand how people encounter encouragement, scepticism, support and suffering both within an organisational context and society at large. This is crucial, given that in any society there exists more or less deeply-rooted ideas that certain types of education, career choices, work and social positions are connected with a certain gender (Binns, 2010; Mavin and Grandy, 2012). Alvesson and Billing argue that:

> Most work is not gender neutral, but is attributed some form of masculinity or femininity, either vaguely or in the shape of more specific ideas about what the work involves and the kind of qualities typically possessed by a 'man' or a 'woman'. (2009, p. 24)

The persistence of feminine career choices, for instance, has been attributed to the internalisation of gendered norms and gender discourses which encourage some women to position themselves as valuing certain feminine characteristics (such as helping, being emotional, or caring) (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016; Smulyan, 2004). This socially-constructed gender positioning makes teaching, for instance, an obvious choice for women with its feminine attributes (e.g. of caring, shaping and nurturing children) (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016). This socially-constructed gender positioning has also been highlighted in leadership roles, where the internalisation of the idea that women are less capable of assuming leadership roles results in women not identifying themselves with potential leadership positions, often considered male territory, thus undermining their motivation and negatively impacting on their professional aspirations (Jonsen et al., 2010; Roberson and Kulik, 2007) (see section 3.6 below).

The concepts of masculinity and femininity, both in their usage in gender discourse and in this study, remain useful, as they make it possible to connect both to the overall societal culture and to the feelings, thoughts, self-understandings and values (i.e. the identities) that characterise individuals (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Cockburn, 1988; Powell et al., 2009). Generally, the concept of masculinity overlaps with male values or male principles (Hines, 1992; Marshall, 1993) such as self-assertion, separation, independence, control, competition, focused perception, rationality, analysis, etc.

Femininity, on the other hand, is a matter of 'the prioritizing of feelings... the importance of the imaginative and creative…' (Hines, 1992, p. 314) with feminine values or principles characterised by 'interdependence, cooperation, receptivity, merging, acceptance, awareness of patterns, wholes and contexts, emotional tone, personalistic perception, being, intuition, and synthesising' (Marshall, 1993, p. 124). The masculinity and femininity categorisation allow gender to be perceived at both a macro- as well as a micro- level of society (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Studying gender issues, however, is never politically neutral due to underlying value judgments (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017).

As discussed in section 3.5.2 above, gender is culturally constructed, and children are socialized to become either men or women through their upbringing (Butler, 1990; Thorne, 1993). This is perceived as the effect of social definitions and internalisations and reproductions of the meaning of being a man or a woman (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Thus, it is the construction of differences between women and men that are not natural, essential or biological that is of particular relevance within this study. This is

because the differences constructed are subsequently looked upon as 'essential'. Kimmel (2000, p. 1) argues that 'gender does not only embody a system by which biological males and females are sorted, divided, and socialized into corresponding sex roles, but it also represents the entire inequality between women and men'. Further, as Alvesson and Billing (2009) point out, a gendered perspective also incorporates a broader view on organisations and society, in addition to:

> dealing with the way men and women are constructed as individuals – how they are formed and reformed through social processes, how they act, how they experience their working life (as well as their private life), how they are supported and discriminated (p. 8)

Thus, Acker (1992) argues that understanding of a gendered organisation should go beyond the organisational level into the society as organisations are essentially the substructures of the society. Inevitably, the gendered relations and patterns of the society permeate into the organisations (Archer and Lloyd, 2002). Lorber (1994, p. 25) argues that 'once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations'. This broader view is important as it aids in exposing some invisible dominant gender ideologies (Bassi et al., 2016; Lewis and Simpson, 2012; Smith et al., 2016) embedded in the society that have permeated organisational settings. This broader view is particularly relevant in my study given that gender is understood, developed and shaped differently in different cultural contexts and times (Burr, 2015). As such, some gender ideologies in the education sector in Saudi Arabia would largely reflect the societal understanding of gender.

Further, men, women and gendered practices are fluid, dynamic and changing (Lorber, 2010), affected by the historical and cultural settings (see 3.5.2). This suggests that any existing gendered practices such as gender inequalities are neither inevitable nor

immutable. There is potential for change in any societal setting though this change can take time depending on the historical and social cultural constraints.

In undertaking this research from a social constructivist perspective, I am therefore more interested in what West and Zimmerman (1987) usefully label as the 'doing of gender' rather than gender per se. This means viewing gender as something people do as opposed to what they are. Thus, gender is never a stable descriptor of an individual, but that an individual is always 'doing gender', through performing or deviating from the socially accepted performance of gender stereotypes (Butler, 2004; West and Zimmerman, 1987). This perspective also views gender as the process of continuously managing ones' behaviour with careful attention to the normative activities assigned to the sex category (Fernando, 2012; Gherardi, 1994). Further, doing gender can also be seen as embodying and believing certain gender and engaging in practices that map on to those norms (Gherardi, 1994). This process of doing gender can take place at the different stages in an individual's life and in the context of organisational settings at the macro and micro- levels (Alvesson and Billing, 2009).

In this study, my focus covers three key aspects within the lives of female head teachers in Saudi Arabia wherein 'doing gender' can be perceived, namely, early childhood, university life and early career, and headship. In all three stages, the individuals would have encountered and impacted upon the prevailing societal ideas about male and female gender roles, as well as the relations between them (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). The female head teachers would have had to respond to these societal ideas/norms on gender in different ways. For instance, the female head teachers could have performed masculinity and downplayed femininity in order to combat societal stereotypes (Priola,

2007). Thus, they could have emulated masculine characteristics. Priola (2007), for example, showed how women in education management in Britain frequently enact masculine behaviours in order to position themselves as good managers, whilst Irvine and Vermilya (2010) revealed the usage of masculine characteristics and downplaying of feminine characteristics by veterinarians in order to succeed.

However, whilst this is recognised as a potential strategy to avoid stereotypes, such emulation of masculinity has been criticised for reinforcing existing mindsets, which, for example, construct effective leaders as male (Powell et al., 2009). Further, it implicitly devalues an individual's femaleness, thus making them 'undone' as women (Butler, 2004). In other instances, the response by individuals to the societal or organisational gender norms could capitalise on the perceived feminine strengths that the head teachers possess. The head teachers could then use this feminine strength in order to establish themselves as individuals and also as effective leaders. For instance, Bolton and Muzio (2007) highlighted the usage of feminine attributes of care and understanding by female lawyers in the UK to attract female clients requiring legal services in family law and welfare. In the context of my study, which includes the headship roles of females in girls' secondary schools, it would be profoundly illustrative to investigate whether female head teachers use the perceived strengths of their feminine gendering in leading their respective girls' schools.

Further, the individuals might have also responded to the societal gender norms through developing their technical skills and portraying themselves as highly competent (Adya, 2008). Thus, the individuals could have used education opportunities available to young women in Saudi Arabia in order to manage the gender biases or social

inequalities. Further, an understanding of the role that education plays in distorting the culturally constructed social norms on gender could be explored through the perception and experiences of the female head teachers. Appreciably, other strategies to respond to gendered social norms are available and through a life history approach, these can be revealed in the case of the female head teachers in Saudi Arabia.

3.6 Women and Leadership

As the current study deals with the leadership roles of female head teachers in girls' secondary schools in Saudi Arabia, exploring the leadership of women is vital to the research. This section critically examines the participation of women in leadership positions and considers various key factors enhancing or constraining their advancement to these leadership positions. It gives both a broader and local perception of women as leaders, and thus sheds light on cultural norms practiced worldwide.

Women's involvement in leadership has increased dramatically over the past three decades and significant research has been conducted in this regard (Klenke, 2017; Powell, 2010; Rhode, 2017; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011; Trammell, 2017). It is impossible, however, to understand the phenomenon of women in leadership positions without referring to intersectionality (Thorpe, 2016), since women's lives are significantly influenced by prevailing gender constructs. This construction of gender is often the main reason for the discrimination between women and men in many societies (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Fletcher, 2004; McDowell, 2018). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010, p. 176) define intersectionality as the 'manner in which multiple aspects of identity may combine in different ways to construct social reality'. Intersectionality

takes into consideration several factors that help in understanding women's positions in any community. These include the interaction of elements of social structure such as gender, ability, age, class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality at many levels. In addition, individual experiences, social practices, institutions, and ideologies frame the outcomes of these interactions in terms of the distribution and allocation of power (Thorpe, 2016).

Gender and leadership have a long history grounded in traditions, culture, religion and politics (Coleman, 2007). Other than the exceptions that were witnessed in a few matriarchal societies, human history has largely been marked by patriarchy (LeGates, 2001). In the West, where a lot of advancements have been made in women's rights, the Judeo-Christian model of patriarchy, grounded in religious scriptures, prevailed for centuries, presented and justified as an absolute by way of divine doctrine (Read, 2003; Yalom, 2009). According to this model, women were articulated as being contingent to men, bearing a stigma as a corrupter of the first man, and thus justifying their subsequent exile to a sphere that accords them a lower status compared to men (LeGates, 2001).

Existing studies on leadership have investigated whether the gender construct of leaders affects their leadership styles, their practices and experiences, and the choices that women make (Acker, 2009; Coleman, 2011; Powell, 2010). For example, work- life balance has emerged as a theme in various studies as one of the aspects affects female leadership (Eagly, 2007; Northouse, 2018; Watts, 2009). Women leaders have to divide their time to practice leadership and take care of the family. Commbs (2004), for instance, found that married women are responsible for more than half the domestic

tasks in their homes. One task found to have the highest impact on women is childcare. Similarly, Padavic et al. (2016) found that a focus on women's childrearing and commitments at home hampers their career success. Responsibilities for family life (current or anticipated) impedes on women's progress because of both external expectations and internal considerations (Abu-Rabia Quader and Oplatka, 2008; Glass and Franceshini, 2007). This is mainly because the family-devotion schema assigns and holds accountable women, not men, for the primary responsibility of housework and childcare (Padavic et al., 2016). The pressure of these demands can sometimes cause stress and force female leaders to feel out of balance. Thus, Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1999, p. 409) argue that 'women's family responsibilities can severely limit their careers in ways that do not generally affect men' while Metz (2005, p. 228) adds that 'having children weakens the relationship between work hours and managerial advancement'. Thus, the dual roles of work and family lead to a significant degree of conflict which results in work overload (Cosimini, 2011; Smith et al., 2016).

Further, it has been argued that women often use their spare time to take care of their families rather than seek new qualifications or hands-on experience (Schmitt et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2016). There is often a tendency in many societies to expect women to shoulder more domestic burdens than men (Fuller, 2015; Smith, 2015). For this reason, most women lack the time to undertake the requisite (additional) training required to qualify to leadership positions. In the same vein, limited training opportunities are more likely to be taken up by men than women given that men in patriarchal societies typically enjoy wider networks of influence and social capital (Forret and Dougherty, 2004; Ibarra, 1997). The limited opportunities for leadership training and for demonstrating competence as a result of power structures in the workplace work

against women (Burke, 2008; Cubillo and Brown, 2003; Schmitt et al., 2009). There are embedded power structures within organisations that subordinate the position of women.

Culture is perceived as one of the leading external barriers to women seeking leadership (Chatty, 2000; Dana, 2009). Culture affects, for example, the public/domestic divide within individuals' lives, gender power relations, role stereotyping and role socialization, which will be different from one culture to another. Thus, Dana (2009, p. 69) argues that culture 'raises barriers for women's aspirations, simply because of the attitudes, learned behaviours and routine practices that are practised and reinforced'. The cultural background systematically constraints women from reaching top leadership positions (Young Shin and Bang, 2013; Al-Jaradat, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2015; Lowe, 2016), as women 'continue to be manipulated to represent symbolically the cultural integrity of the dominant culture' (Chatty, 2000, p. 246). As a result of culture norms that instigate gender discrimination, women fail to reach the same level of success as men (Metcalfe, 2008; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). However, the cultural settings vary from one country to another. On the other hand, the limited representation of women in leadership may also be a consequence of internal factors such as lack of confidence, lack of awareness, lack of aspiration, gender-based socialisation, fear of failure, lower self-esteem, limited mobility and interrupted career development (Acker, 1995; Cubillo and Brown, 2003).

Evidence from developing countries supports the idea of gender inequality and the subordinated position of women with respect to leadership. Although women are given equal status by the constitutions of these countries, practical implementation of these

constitutional rights are still missing (Belwal and Belwal, 2014; Eddy et al., 2015). This is specifically true in terms of assigning women leadership positions (Faulkner, 2015; Moghadam, 2004). Thus, Belwal and Belwal (2014) argue that there is need to go beyond the legal support system in order to support women to leadership roles. Given the high number of cultural and institutional barriers in most of developing countries, women's rise to leadership is limited to exceptional circumstances, usually when they get family support that exceeds the socially constructed views against women leadership (Al-Jaradat, 2014; Muzvidziwa, 2014; Schmidt and Mestry, 2015). Some scholars refer to the idea that women being leaders works against their cultural practices and, consequently, they are prevented from reaching this position (Blackmore, 2010; Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010; Oplatka, 2006).

In the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the sustained momentum of reform projects that favour girls' education and women's rise to leadership often requires that women (e.g. female headteachers) demonstrate that it is possible to play the role of an ideal woman and still be a leader (Alharbi, 2014). This is particularly crucial for head teachers for two key reasons. Firstly, this idealization is pivotal as they act as mentors and role models for both female teachers and the girls in the schools they head. Secondly, the perception of the female head teachers in the eyes of society is important in shaping an alternative discourse, as suggested in Burr (2003), that will show that it is possible for women to be leaders but still not follow the 'ills' associated with the western culture (Hamdan, 2005). One positive aspect of the Saudi Arabian education system is that by allowing female-only institutions, problems associated with resistance by male teachers to female leadership, as is the case in some countries in the region, does not arise (Arar and Abramovitz, 2013).

In general, the low level of women's participation in leadership positions has repeatedly been reported in the reviewed literature. Several reasons have been proposed for these low levels of participation. These could be categorized into internal factors, for example personal traits and barriers, and external variables, which include the social and religious factors prevalent in the regions where the studies were conducted. Leadership has been associated with men in these regions due to a complex web of traditions, culture, religion and politics (LeGates, 2001). The presented literature indicates that the major religions, different cultures and traditions hold the consistent view that women are weaker compared to men (Butler, 2006). This view has been used as a justification for the exclusion of women to leadership positions across the globe. The physiological aspect of women's lives also tends to confine them for longer periods at home as they get involved in child bearing and care. Whilst there has been considerable progress towards legislating for conditions that prevent the disadvantaging of women who decide to have children in developed countries, most developing countries are yet to come up with women-friendly policies (Abu-Rabia Quader and Oplatka, 2008). Furthermore, in light of the above results from previous studies, it could be conceived that women who are in leadership positions usually face numerous limitations with regards to their roles. These limitations are generated from inherited suppositions and prevalent beliefs.

3.7 Women's Paths to Educational Leadership

While the previous section discussed women's leadership in general workplaces and their inclusion or exclusion from management and leadership, this section looks specifically at the situation of female leadership in the educational sector. It analyses their

paths to the position and explores the barriers they encounter to reach the position of school headship.

The under-representation of women's leadership in the educational sector has been well documented since the '80s both in the United Kingdom and the United States (Oplatka and Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006). This under-representation is most evident in superintendent and high school head teacher positions. Further, research has shown notable improvements in the number of head teachers in the recent past which has also attracted a proliferation of research interest in head teachers (Bush, 2017; Jones, 2017; Mathis, 2010; Oplatka and Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006; 2014).

Research has also found that women are expected to have more qualifications and qualities than men to be accepted as leaders (Young Shin and Bang, 2013; Eagly, 2007). There is no consensus among scholars as to whether women should use their feminine appeal or adopt the masculine outlook that fits with expectations of leadership positions (Eagly, 2007; Kark et al., 2012). Literature on women accessing school leadership positions considers cultural, economic and socio-cultural differences from one society to another. In this respect, Dimmock and Walker (2000) argue that societal culture forms an important factor in the future development of the field while Wong (1998) states that the omission of societal culture as a factor in leadership assumes the universal application of existing, western, theories, which frequently prove inappropriate to emerging educational contexts both in the developing world and elsewhere. Similarly, Samier (2015) argues that the theories and models of western countries may not be appropriate for Arab countries because of the differences in the socio-cultural

contexts. These social and cultural differences impact other factors such as nationality, race, religion and identity (Oplatka and Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006).

According to Fuller (2017), the United Kingdom (UK) is one of the countries that has instituted deliberate efforts to achieve gender parity in education leadership. This has been done partly by the enactment of the Equality Act 2010 that seeks to protect individuals against discrimination from leadership positions on the basis of colour, age, race, gender, disability, marriage, religion and sexual orientation. Fuller's (2017) study examined the gender of school head teachers, drawing on publicly-available online data, and found only a 1% increase in the number of women school head teachers from 2014. To put this into perspective, a study conducted in 2014 had found that women constituted 62.2% of the total teaching workforce of secondary schools but only 37% of head teachers (DfE, 2015). The Department for Education's (2015) study findings is broadly consistent with other studies that show education as a feminine field (Hutchings et al., 2012; Hoskins, 2010; Mercer, 2013). Fuller (2017) also provided evidence of the wide disparities between different local authorities in the UK.

The environment in the USA is very similar to the one presented by the UK. Blount (2004) found that men constituted 86% of school administrators nationwide, 65% of deputy administrators, 65% of vice heads and 86% of heads, squeezing women out of leadership of schools. Thus, Gupton (2009) made notable conclusions that are useful in building progress among women leaders. Firstly, she suggests a change of perception and policies towards work and family balance. Secondly, she recommends a system of mentoring for women who wish to attain leadership positions as a response to the problem of women not rising beyond mid-level management positions. Lastly, she

calls upon women administrators to contribute to the discourse on family and women leadership with a view to influencing policy. These recommendations are also echoed by other scholars (Bynum, 2015; Kovnatska, 2014; Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994). For instance, Lahtinen and Wilson (1994, p. 20) noted that mentoring is 'key for women to advance in their career' while Bynum (2015) identified the inspirational effects of mentoring on women's advancement to leadership positions.

Compared to the western countries discussed above, women's leadership in the developing world offers a radically different picture (Arar and Mustafa, 2011; Celikten, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2010). For instance, in countries where men are allowed to lead boys', girls' and mixed secondary schools as opposed to women, the proportion of female head teachers reduced significantly, as seen in countries such as Sri Lanka (Arachchi and Edrisinghe, 2011). However, this may be an extreme case, given that the overall labour force participation of women in the country is only 33.4% (World Bank, 2016). A study from Kenya found that women were perceived by external stakeholders as lacking in the necessary confidence to lead mixed secondary schools and inflexible in their decision-making (Mberia, 2017). Another study conducted in Turkey showed that women do not apply to be head teachers, despite being as well qualified as male applicants, at least in part because they have negative self-perceptions and lack confidence in their qualifications and experience (Celikten, 2005). This is consistent with other studies that highlight that women lack confidence in applying for promotion and are comparatively hesitant in making career plans (Coleman, 2007; Shapira, Arar and Azaiza, 2011). Celikten (2005) also found that women seem to be their own worst enemies, working to undermine each other.

Many researchers have stressed the need for more studies about the experiences of women leaders in developing countries to give broader understandings of this phenomenon within diverse social contexts (Arar and Abu-Rabia Quader, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2006; Oplatka, 2006). This is particularly important, given that most studies were conducted in Europe or North America. Thus, the literature does not sufficiently cover women's representation in leadership in developing countries. In particular, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding Saudi Arabian women's perspectives and experiences on educational leadership (school headship) positions and the related barriers (or enablers). My study is specifically interested in women leadership in girls' secondary schools in a Middle East country of Saudi Arabia. Thus, an understanding of women leadership in the Middle East is discussed next.

3.8 Women leadership in the Middle East

In general, the findings from studies on women's leadership in Middle East are not overly different from those in the Western countries. The under-representation of women in educational leadership is an ongoing issue which has been repeatedly reported in the Arab World (Arar, 2018; Arar et al., 2013; Lumby and Azaola, 2014; World Bank, 2018). This is reflective of the wider under-representation of women in the region. For instance, the World Bank (2018) reported a 27% and 30% ratio of female to male participation in the labour force for Saudi Arabia and the Middle East respectively (see figure 2 below).

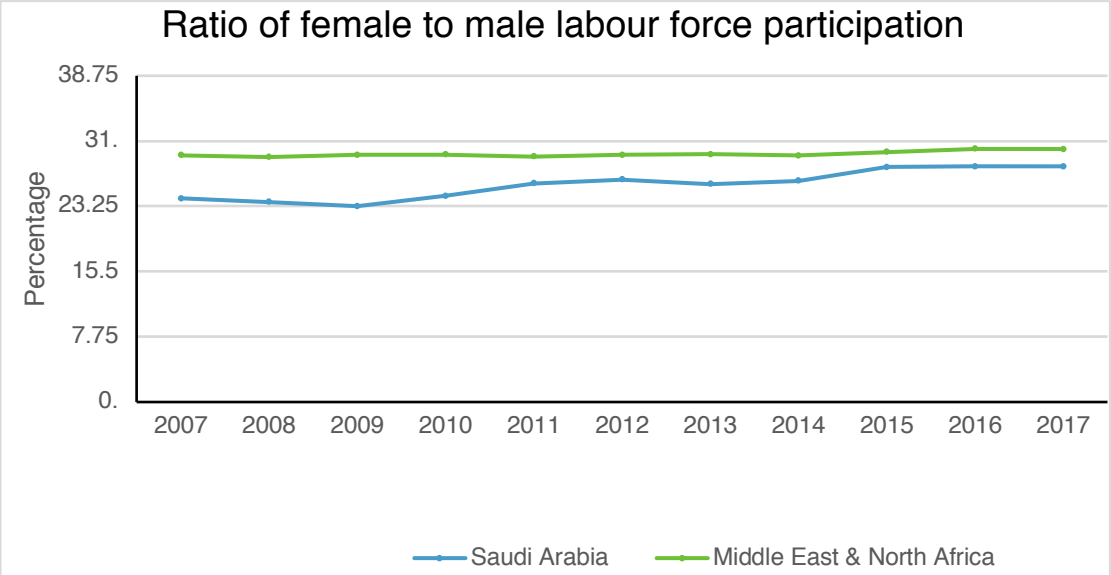

Figure 2: Ratio of female to male labour force participation

Source: World Bank, 2018

Khattab and Ibrahim (2006) offer some statistical explanation for the observed low number of female principals among Arabic Palestinians. According to Khattab and Ibrahim (2006), the low number of female principals is associated with the religious composition of the country which also dictates the control of schools. In Palestine, Muslims comprise 79% of the population with the rest being Christians (12%) and Jews/Druze (9%). Access to schools is affected by religious affiliations, as each religious region controls its own schools and determines the admission criteria. Their study found that the differences in the level of participation of women in the teaching sector were based on religious affiliation. Women formed the majority of the teaching workforce among the Jewish population at 87%, 82% and 70% for primary, intermediate, and secondary education respectively. By contrast, among the Muslim population, it was only at the primary education level that women were the majority, where at intermediate and secondary education levels they constituted 48% and 34% of the

workforce respectively. The study also highlighted that women's representation in the education sector was increasing, albeit at a slower pace.

Thus, compared to other religious groups, such as Christians and Jews, Muslim women in Palestine were far less likely to become principals or vice principals, at 19% and 24% respectively, despite Palestinian women comprising two-thirds of teaching jobs in total (Khattab and Ibrahim 2006). Khattab and Ibrahim's (2006) study, however, does not attempt to isolate or account for the various issues that profoundly complicate the Israeli-Arab demographic relationships. Instead, Khattab and Ibrahim (2006) suggest that the problem of low progression to leadership is partly due to few opportunities available to the workforce, which are rapidly taken up by men. The patriarchal, male-dominated societies of Palestine (and other Arab countries) reinforce this barrier. The men in these societies usually pursue high status and prestige, whereas women are perceived as unfit and lacking in the necessary skills and abilities to become leaders (Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Arar, 2018).

The Arab Human Development Report (2005) usefully sums up the position of the Arab countries on matters of gender empowerment. The Arab region was ranked second from the last among all regions of the world in empowering women to participate in the social and economic spheres, ranking ahead of only Sub-Saharan Africa. This position has remained largely unchanged in the decade since the publication of the report, as depicted in Figure 2 above. Further, whilst religious orientation is important in the case of the Middle East, Sidani (2005) argues that there is a pressing need to retain the distinction in social sciences research between Arabs and Islam, as not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. In an attempt to dissect the issue

of women leadership further, Hernissi (1991) criticizes the apparent opposition in society to women's leadership as one lacking any basis in either the Quran, Islamic traditions or the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, except for personal interests that are threatened by women. For instance, a study undertaken in Morocco found that men extended their control of women both at home and at work. Men seem to justify the confinement of women to the home environment by presenting women at work as subjugated to the extent that they control female workers' salary and career progression (Hernissi, 1987). Thus, Al-Munajjed (1997, p. 31) argues that 'misconceptions about the role of women in the Islamic society can only be extirpated by differentiating between the teachings of Islam as a religion and a way of life and local customs and traditions, which are often conceived as part of it'.

Tribal practices, which are common in the Arab World, were found to be a major barrier to women's leadership and advancement due to the difficulty of incorporating the traditional Arab customs into a modernizing society (Al-Qaradwi, 1998; El-Saadawi, 1982). Al-Qaradwi (1998), for instance, argues that the roots and norms of Arabic societies belong to tribal traditions; these traditions involved not simply male domination and patriarchal protection, but also the beliefs that women could not be leaders and that their roles were inside the house and serving the family. However, women are able to circumvent and learn outside these of norms through new communication media such as television, radio, newspapers and the internet (Al-Suwaihel, 2010; Soffan, 1980). In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Madsen (2010) found that women strive to excel in their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Most women are also educated and economically active, seeking financial freedom. Thus, whilst the problem in the

Arab World relates to the socio-cultural context, which involves the acceptance of women as leaders with equal rights as men (Madsen, 2010), this is gradually changing.

Further, Arar and Abu-Rabia Quader (2011) describe the experiences of two female Arab head teachers of Muslim schools in Israel and identified three challenges faced by the women in their headship positions:

> (1) the pressure and demands of the role itself; (2) the difficulty involved in breaking new ground to become a woman principal when there are no precedents; and (3) the pressure of the woman's family role, especially for the Arab woman, who is expected to fulfil the role of wife at home parallel to her role as school principal, a dual role with conflicting expectations. (p. 426)

Besides the specific challenges of their leadership roles, female leaders in Israel, like other Middle Eastern countries, continue to face societal pressures that include societal opposition and cultural prejudice, as they are made to feel that their male counterparts are better leaders (Al-Hussein, 2011; Al-Joulani, 1993; Arar and Abramovitz, 2013). However, despite these challenges, some women have successfully reached headship positions in the Middle East. In Israel for instance, Shapira, Arar and Azaiza (2011) show how seven female school principals have contributed to school development in an Israeli educational context.

In another recent study, Arar (2018) examines the challenges faced by six female Arab school principals in their path to headship appointment. Through the life stories of the six female principals, Arar (2018) concludes that the women's path to educational leadership positions is not easy, presenting a number of key difficulties and obstacles

that the individuals each needed to overcome. The female principals perceived both societal and cultural constructs as significantly contributing to these obstacles to the leadership position. Thus, Arar (2018, p. 1) concludes that female educational leaders 'employ their strong characteristics, their empowered agency, and the values they acquire and represent to improve their social status, transform their personal and professional identity, and improve their resources despite restrictive cultural norms'. In consideration of the societal and cultural challenges and obstacles faced by women leaders, Arar (2018) echoes other scholars' calls (Abalkhail, 2017; Al-Lamky, 2007; Karam and Afiouni, 2014; Sidani et al., 2015) for government intervention to promote women leadership in highly patriarchal societies of the Middle East. The reviewed studies help to give a broader context to my study in highlighting the range of challenges and potential limitations faced by women in the Middle East in their quest to leadership (headship) positions.

Focusing on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), it can be seen that significant steps have taken place in the last two decades, leading to a marked increase in the participation of women in senior management positions in both the public and private sectors (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Asfour et al., 2017). The changes have been instituted by government agencies and the private sector partly because of the Third National Dialogue Forum of 2003, which sought to expand women's occupational rights. Thus, in the education sector, an increasing number of women are appointed as teachers and head teachers of schools and colleges in Saudi Arabia (Rugh, 2002; Hamdan, 2005). With regard to educational leadership in Saudi Arabia, studies show that women are increasingly active in such roles, with women taking a number of senior educational positions

and leading higher educational institutions (Abdullah 2008; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Parveen, 2014).

Despite this progress, however, it has been found that women continue to face barriers and difficulties in their leadership positions (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Alhareth et al., 2015). For instance, Al-Ahmadi's (2011) study which sought to examine the challenges that Saudi women leaders encounter in governmental institutions highlights several challenges. These challenges are conveniently categorized, including structural challenges, challenges related to lack of resources, the lack of empowerment for women, and cultural and personal challenges. Al-Ahmadi (2001) found that women leaders had limited decision-making powers, lacked relevant training and faced social pressures both at home and at work that hindered their abilities to exercise their leadership roles effectively. These findings are largely consistent with other studies on women's leadership in the Middle East (e.g. Al Ariss et al., 2014; Al-Lamky, 2007).

According to Metcalfe (2008), the lack of empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia strongly affects their leadership opportunities and their ability to discharge their leadership roles as they lack the necessary supportive tools. Sabaih's (2010) research, which investigated the training needs of female head teachers in southern areas of the KSA, supports this argument, finding that women's training needs often remained unmet, particularly in the areas of 'information technology and communication, administrative requirements, staff development, student affairs, and local community' (p. 284). The study also highlighted the importance of financially inducing women to headship positions.

Further, unlike other countries in the region, the KSA has a unique context because of the existing norm of a strict segregation between the sexes: for instance, women are generally not allowed to move around without the company of a male (Wikorowicz, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2016). Saudi Arabia has been described as 'the most gender segregated nation in the world' (Benjamin, 2016; The Week, 2018), 'with women requiring male permission to work, travel, study, marry or even access healthcare. They are also unable to drive or open a bank account and must be accompanied by a male chaperone on shopping trips' (Independent, 2016). The female head teachers are overtly law-abiding and adhere to all traditions, but the very existence of a woman as a leader is against popular preconceptions of the role of a woman. This role is one that has been promoted by the conservative ideologies that have permeated the religious, economic, legal and social aspects of everyday life (Abu-Rabia Quader and Oplatka, 2008; Alsweel, 2009; Hamdan, 2005).

Hamdan (2005) points out the introduction of cultural traditions that have no basis on Islamic religious texts into religious practices. The conservatives promote this goal through a selective reading and interpretation of the Quran. However, as Hamdan (2005) argues, the actual application of the teachings of the Quran challenges traditional cultural practices that have infiltrated Islam. For instance, both of Prophet Mohammed's wives are cited in the Quran as leaders in their own right. Ayesha, one of the prophet's wives, commanded an army of 30,000 soldiers, and she is also acknowledged as a contributor to the 'Hadith', as she related and taught the practice of the Prophet to his followers, including men (Hamdan, 2005). Others have also supported this view (e.g. Al-Munajjed, 1997; Mahmood, 2015), arguing that Muslim women

have often been unable to enjoy the freedom and rights ascribed to them by Islam because of these social-cultural traditions and tribal mindsets.

Other studies examining female educational leadership in KSA have indicated that women head teachers require escorting by their husbands or other male relatives to government offices on official school business (Alsweel, 2009; Rajasekar and Beh, 2013; Alakarni, 2014). This is besides the obvious consequence of segregation, where women can only lead girls' schools. Furthermore, women are not allowed to work in boys' schools as either teachers or as head teachers, and this segregated system applies to girls' schools. This shows how intricate the gender segregation is, appearing at both micro- and macro-levels of society (Abalkhail, 2017).

Further, in Saudi Arabia's education sector, the leadership abilities and contributions of women are usually overlooked, as decision making is the preserve of directors in the Ministry of Education (MoE), characterized by a top-down command-and-control management style (Alsufyan, 2002; Lindsey, 2010). Thus, these directors receive little in the way of counterargument or opposition, with female head teachers' contributions largely ignored. This is because, firstly, women are not expected to challenge men and, secondly, there should be no direct contact between unrelated people of opposite gender (Abalkhail, 2017). Shapira, Arar and Azaiza (2011) further argues that female head teachers' contributions are often not considered even if they write formal letters to the directors in the ministry. With little contribution or say at the MoE, Alsufyan (2002) argues that the female head teachers are essentially relegated by the ministry to the status of managers, which denies them the 'use of their abilities to make and implement leadership decisions within their schools' (p. 2). As stated above, the characteristics of

a highly patriarchal society are evident here also. The general perception is that females are not capable of competent leadership and those in leadership are seen as abjuring their main role (Arar and Abramovitz, 2013).

Research shows that there are systemic social, cultural and religious barriers that serve to prevent the rise of women in leadership and limit the full potential of the few who are in leadership (Abu-Rabia Quader and Oplatka, 2008; Alsweel, 2009; Al-Munajjed, 1997; Hamdan, 2005; Mahmood, 2015). As a result of this social fabric, the majority of people in the KSA are hesitant to acknowledge the role of women in leadership positions and public life in general (Chulov, 2017). For this reason, the education system was and to some extent still is geared towards preparing women for 'roles subordinate to the position of men' (Smith, 1987, p. 34), but feigns religious motives for preventing women from challenging the status quo (Alakarni, 2014; Alzaidi, 2008; Al-Jaradat, 2014; Hamdan, 2005). Female head teachers are required to espouse the qualities of an ideal woman prescribed by conservative traditions, yet, according to an earlier survey, the often-retrogressive laws are reluctantly adhered to because no single person can challenge the established system (Kurdi, 2011; Mathis, 2010).

From the above review of the literature on women and leadership (at global, regional and national levels), it can be concluded that women consistently face unequal opportunities in attaining leadership positions. Due to multiple overlapping societal and cultural factors, women would generally not progress to the top administrative positions of a given organization, even in situations where they might have qualifications, skills and abilities. This is true even in careers such as teaching and nursing that are globally associated with increasing numbers of women practitioners (Hutchings et al., 2012;

Hoskins, 2010; Mercer, 2013; Shah and Shah, 2012). Given the societal and cultural barriers, this bias is a strong motivation to gain further insight into the experiences of those women who have made it to leadership positions. Thus, possible questions which could be raised include, ‘do successful women who eventually take up leadership responsibilities experience challenges? and ‘do the above mentioned socio-cultural, gender, and religious factors impede their performance in educational settings? The next section delves deeper into exploring the challenges facing women in educational positions.

3.9 Challenges Facing Women in Educational Leadership Positions

My research focuses on the life journeys and experiences of female head teachers, which includes the challenges that they face in performing their duties as school leaders. This section reviews a range of challenges faced by women in educational leadership positions discussed in the existing literature. While some of these challenges stem from the socio-cultural environment, others originate from the women leaders themselves. Thus, Fuller and Harford (2016) argue that these challenges can usefully be categorised as being due to personal, organisational and socio-cultural factors. Therefore, the challenges are associated with factors similar to those discussed above that hinder women from reaching leadership positions. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) assert that when women rise to top leadership positions, the pre-nomination challenges remain an ongoing process, which is even worse in highly patriarchal societies. The challenges thus not only have an impact on the women’s attainment of leadership positions, but also affect their leadership experiences. These challenges could create an unpleasant atmosphere for the proper discharge of leadership duties.

Research on female head teachers has focused on the challenges that they face in administering schools, on gender inequality in the allocation of head teacher positions, and on the difference between male and female head teachers in terms of attitude and behaviour (Bunting, 1970; Chiramba, 2016; Fuller, 2017; Oplatka and Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006). It is suggested that male head teachers would not encounter such challenges (Growe and Montgomery, 2000; Naidoo and Perumal, 2014). For example, it is argued that owing to their gender roles, women are considered to be physically and emotionally weaker than men and, as such, they are not able to discipline students, especially in high school contexts (Lumby, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007). This situation is evidenced where women lead mixed gender institutions. For instance, male participants in Simpson's (2004) study expressed uneasiness working under female leaders, especially in confrontational occasions where they were afraid that the female leader might break down in tears.

To investigate the effect of gender on female leaders, Coleman (2007) compared the situations of female head teachers in secondary schools in England at two different times, specifically, in the 1990s and in 2004. Coleman's (2007) findings reveal that female head teachers faced discrimination from governors and other members in their communities and that this prejudice was based on their gender. Similarly, as part of a multiple case study, Smith (2008) investigated the impact of race and gender on work performance among three African-American head teachers in high schools. Smith (2008) concluded that the participants experienced negative stereotypes based on their gender and race, as they were seen by their colleagues and the local community as easily manipulated and intimidated.

In Greece, Kaparou and Bush (2007) explored the professional lives of six female principals of secondary schools. Their findings indicated that although all participants acknowledged having equal leadership opportunities, they faced external and internal difficulties in their career development. While the external barriers related to cultural attitudes towards women's roles and a lack of mentoring, the internal barriers referred to personal traits. Kaparou and Bush's (2007) findings are largely consistent with studies conducted in other countries, for instance, on the lack of women's access to mentoring (Bynum, 2015; Kovnatska, 2014; Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994).

In the United States, Sanchez and Thornton (2010) conducted a review of literature on the barriers encountered in educational leadership in both primary and secondary schools. From their review, Sanchez and Thornton (2010) identified stereotyping as the main barrier for the female leaders to inspire to do more in their positions. Other barriers identified were the conflicts that existed between their earlier roles as teachers and their current roles as principals, and the elevated job commitments associated with low salary and family responsibilities. These results were also reflected by Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), who added that these challenges are particularly daunting to the African-American female school leaders because of their race.

Similar results were found in a doctoral research carried out by Benson (2013) on six female principals in Texas schools. Her analysis identified unintentional challenges including familial obligations and societal expectations placed on women. Equally, Parker (2015) found that female head teachers felt frustrated, conflicted about home and work demands, exhausted, pressured and isolated. They also experienced heavy workloads and referred to inadequate salaries. In fact, balancing work and family life

was seen to be an ongoing challenge (Stewart, 2014; Wrushen and Sherman, 2008). Furthermore, a study done in Italy by Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014) asserted that women leaders lacked support from their male colleagues and were stereotyped as unable to lead. In Sri Lanka, Arachchi and Edrisinghe (2011) conducted a qualitative study on female head teachers to investigate the difficulties encountered in their performance in their respective schools. The participants in their study, three women head teachers, commented on their limited abilities to cope with home and work responsibilities, limited support from higher officers and low self-esteem.

Moving to higher education settings, many studies have contributed to shed light on female leaders in higher education (Hoskins, 2010; Mercer, 2009; Madsen, 2007a; Mohajeri and Mousavi, 2017; Nguyen (2013); Taj, 2016). Madsen (2007a) interviewed ten female university presidents to explore their experiences of being in a leadership position. The female university presidents identified some key challenges that they experienced during their presidencies which included managing family affairs, health issues and racial discrimination. Similarly, Nguyen (2013) conducted a qualitative study and interviewed six Vietnamese female deans to explore the obstacles to their career development. Nguyen (2013) found that the most common barriers reported among the female deans was strong family commitments, which included their roles as mothers and wives. The female deans also reported challenges related to gender-based stereotypes as colleagues perceived them as indecisive, incapable and unable to meet the responsibilities of their positions.

In another study, Mohajeri et al. (2015) reviewed Western and Eastern literature that addressed the challenges of women in leadership positions in higher education from

1995 to 2014. Three major themes emerged from their review of the literature: 'cultural factors, organisational practice, and individual aspects' (p. 10). Mohajeri et al. (2015) further highlight that Eastern and Western countries dealt with these challenges differently and largely insufficiently. Taj's (2016) study of nine women educational leaders in Pakistan also highlighted similar challenges to those reported in other countries, such as family affairs, gender, limited authority and resources. However, Taj (2016) also found that women educational leaders in Pakistan experienced uncommon challenges and unique barriers. These unique challenges include terrorism, endemic corruption within the educational system and difficulties in managing financial affairs. These were highlighted by the nine women educational leaders as the challenges which hindered female educational leaders from progressing into leadership development in a Pakistani context. For instance, some of the women educational leaders reported that their schools, especially those operated and funded by the armed forces, were being targeted or attacked by terrorist organizations. The terrorists usually try to exclude girls from receiving education. Accordingly, parents were hesitant to send their daughters to the schools over fears of bomb blasts that destroyed many girls' schools in Pakistan. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has reported similar cases of attacks on girls' schools in Afghanistan (HRW, 2017), while the Guardian commented that 'the Taliban's main fear is not drones but educated girls' (The Guardian, 2012).

In a recent study, Mohajeri and Mousavi (2017) explored the challenges faced by 20 female academic leaders in Iranian universities. Several challenges were identified by the female academic leaders including conflicts between their domestic and work duties, expectations of their gender roles, lack of confidence, unfriendly working environment, and negative social attitudes. These findings are largely consistent with other

studies, such as Arar (2018), who examined the challenges faced by educational leaders in Palestine and Jordan. In Jordan, 187 female educational leaders spoke about the challenges they faced in their work (Al-Jaradat, 2014). Results of Al-Jaradat's (2014) study indicated that female educational leaders mostly encountered medium to high levels of organisational, personal, social and physical challenges, which did not differ with variations in individuals' qualifications and years of professional experience.

When compared to studies carried out on women's leadership in other parts of the world, some unique contextual differences are evident in Saudi Arabia. In the KSA, for instance, the ratio of women who participate in education is higher than men (Alyami, 2014; Hamdan, 2005; Rugh, 2002; UNESCO, 2018), with the Ministry of Education (MoE) reporting that over 56.6% of the total number of students are female (MoE, 2010). This is despite the observation that some educational facilities for women are not of the same standards as those of men. When it comes to their careers, women have to choose between having a family and pursuing a career (Abalkhail, 2017; Alyami, 2014; Hamdan, 2005; Rugh, 2002), which is broadly similar to findings from around the world. There are societal expectations of the role of women as home makers, and those who tread outside these expectations are seen as rebelling against 'holy teachings' (Abalkhail, 2017).

One crucial aspect stands out from the review of the literature on female leadership of head teachers in Saudi Arabian girls' schools, namely that it seems impossible to discuss the role of female head teachers without considering the restrictions on women's participation in public affairs (Alharbi, 2014; Alzaidi, 2008). These restrictions have a bearing on how school head teachers perform their leadership roles given that they

are holders of a public office. It is fair to recognize that there are barriers that inhibit women's progress in almost all societies of the world (Al-Jaradat, 2014; Young Shin and Bang, 2013; Cook and Glass, 2014; Felder and Vuollo, 2008; Hamdan, 2005; Holmes, 2005; Hoobler et al., 2011). However, the KSA context provides a unique challenge regarding inhibiting women's access to leadership roles, and various possible explanations can be explored. With regards to education, previous studies have focused on explaining the challenges facing the sector in general, particularly those that have prevented both men and women school heads from functioning optimally (Alakarni, 2014; Alzaidi, 2008; Sabaih, 2010). The relationship between the general perceptions of women in the majority conservative population is explored as an additional obstacle unique to female school head teachers. The guardianship policy further undermines any merited authority held by female school heads (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Alzaidi's (2008) study findings are largely consistent with the findings of Mathis' (2010) study on female head teachers' challenges in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Despite the difference in the methodological approach, with Alzaidi using a mixed-method approach and Mathis using a qualitative approach, these studies revealed that lack of authority and the centralized educational system were most commonly identified as barriers to leadership among female head teachers. These barriers in turn resulted in the female head teachers' lack of confidence in their leadership abilities. The head teachers also expressed dissatisfaction at insufficient professional development opportunities offered by the MoE.

A study by Alakarni (2014) on the conditions of head teachers in KSA found that head teachers were greatly discouraged for various reasons. The first reason was that there was no recognition for exemplary performance undertaken by school heads and it was often the case that good performers were treated the same way as incompetent and underperforming heads. The second aspect made the aspiration to seek headship positions worthless given that the basic salary was the same as that of ordinary teachers (Alakarni, 2014). Thus, most teachers would prefer to be deputy head teachers rather than head teachers, taking on fewer responsibilities for a similar financial reward (Sabaih, 2010).

Alzaidi (2008) further captures a picture of the working environment for school heads in Saudi Arabia regardless of their gender. The Ministry of Education (MoE) has deployed a centralized educational system with a flat managerial structure, despite the title of the school head recently being changed to 'leader' (Al-Asfour, 2017). The head teacher has a reduced role without the ability to make significant decisions in the school, thus affecting their efficacy as managers (Alakarni, 2014; Mathis, 2010; Sabaih, 2010). Alzaidi (2008) found that there is lack of training opportunities and financial resources for female head teachers. Furthermore, the role of a head teacher is almost reduced to one of a messenger in a highly centralized education system. Matters required in the administration of education such as school buildings and estate management, purchase of equipment and textbooks, as well as the hiring and promotion of staff are all conducted by the Ministry of Education (Alharbi, 2014; Al-Asfour, 2017; Sabaih, 2010). School heads are not involved in the setting of goals but are only expected to act on directions from the ministry. There are complaints that some of the

directions from the Ministry are not clear and the process of obtaining responses to letters from school heads takes too long (Hamdan, 2005).

Laila (2015) explored the barriers encountered by Saudi head teachers in establishing effective schools. Laila's (2015) participants were both male and female head teachers in schools in Jeddah. The study revealed several barriers, including the existence of a centralized system, limited facilities and resources, heavy workload, limited authority and power given to individual head teachers, and a lack of independence. These findings are consistent with other studies on female leadership in Saudi Arabia (e.g. Alharbi, 2014; Al-Asfour, 2017; Sabaih, 2010). Similar to the studies of Alzaidi (2008) and Alakarni (2014), Abubakar and Musa (2015) surveyed job satisfaction among female head teachers in the Eastern region of KSA. Although the female head teachers surveyed expressed their satisfaction with their work, salaries and promotions seemed to be their main concern.

Further, Almaki et al. (2016) explored the main challenges experienced by Muslim women academic leaders working in Saudi and Malaysian universities. The academic leaders' experiences included perceptions of negative attitudes towards them as insufficient or inadequate leaders. These perceptions are mainly rooted in cultural and religious expectations of their gender roles. For instance, in these contexts, a female leader is perceived as easily influenced emotionally in the workplace. Almaki et al. (2016) further found that Saudi women leaders expressed concerns regarding their lack of autonomy to make decisions as these had to be approved by their male colleagues. Personal challenges were also reported in both communities, for instance, maintaining balance between domestic and work duties, in a manner similar to studies conducted

in other countries (Abalkhail, 2017; Alyami, 2014; Hamdan, 2005; Rugh, 2002). Organisational barriers were also identified, such as dealing with people from a broad range of religious, cultural and ethnic groups, overloading of responsibilities, lack of leadership training, and being at risk of high levels of pressure and stress. Almaki et al. (2016) note that these challenges had affected the women academic leaders even before their attainment of leadership positions.

Whilst there has been growing research on the challenges facing women educational leaders worldwide, there is still a dearth of research on female head teachers in KSA. The Saudi studies reviewed suggest that Saudi women educational leaders share some of the challenges faced by women leaders worldwide such as work performance and development. These challenges can be usefully divided into three categories: cultural and religious, internal, and organisational challenges. However, as Hallinger and Hammad (2017) argue, in their review of educational leadership and management studies among Arab societies from 2000 to 2016, this area of research is still underdeveloped in the Arab world, and that KSA is one of the smallest contributors to the literature on educational leadership. Therefore, there is still a need for further qualitative research involving head teachers who serve in different regions of the KSA and in different periods of time, a need my study explicitly aims to address.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that numerous challenges exist for women in leadership positions ranging from structural challenges, cultural and internal barriers, including women's own perceptions of their leadership abilities. In the Middle East specifically, there are added concerns as all kinds of work and social relationships are governed by strong family networks that encode deeply-held religious beliefs

and traditions (Metcalfe, 2008, quoted in Al-Ahmadi, 2011), further complicating the situation. Having reviewed the challenges and barriers, the next section reviews the strategies used by women leaders to cope or respond to the challenges and barriers.

3.10 Dealing with Challenges and Influencers

This section discusses the factors that influence female head teachers to maintain their headship positions, become better equipped to encounter the challenges, and eventually be able to promote positive changes in leadership. In general, the literature shows that the female head teachers' responses range from initiating internal efforts and using external means to proving their leadership capacities (Arar, 2018; Fennell, 2005; Madsen, 2007a, 2007b; Reed, 2012).

Fennell (2005) interviewed six successful Canadian female head teachers exploring their lived experiences with leadership. Many techniques were used by the participants to overcome their work barriers, namely:

> Developing a professional community within the school, valuing people and their unique contributions to the learning community, viewing knowledge as a powerful and expandable resource to be shared by all members of the learning community, and resisting practices and policies from the broader educational context that were perceived to interfere with the goals of the learning community. (Fennell, 2005, p. 152)

To deal with social attitudes and roles, educational women leaders employ different strategies that help them to be effective head teachers. For example, the participants of Wrushen and Sherman's study (2008) adopted a compassionate attitude, worked

hard and spent extra time in order to gain the trust of the local community. Sanchez and Thornton (2010), in their review, found that female head teachers felt more satisfied with their roles as a result of peer mentors, training, and the length of their work experience. Strategies for overcoming the issue of work-home conflict varied depending on husbands' characteristics and family structure but included giving more time and attention to work and family and effective time exploitation.

Reed's (2012) study on three African-American women principals at an American school showed how they confronted gender and race challenges by doing their best at work, being assertive in their roles, and trying not to show feminine characteristics while nurturing students. In a similar research study by Jean-Marie (2013), African-American female head teachers identified factors that assisted them in navigating gender and race barriers, including seeking support from their close friends, adhering to their spiritual faith, and relying on themselves to find opportunities to improve their extensive experiences.

In southern Georgia, as part of a doctoral thesis, Coaxum-Young (2017) interviewed five female secondary head teachers from a metropolitan school district. While her participants experienced gender discrimination at their workplace, they spent extra effort to increase students' achievement and worked collaboratively with the school staff offering continuous support. An investigation of the life career history of seven high school female leaders carried out by Hansen (2014) revealed that receiving support from family members like parents and spouses, together with drawing support from friendship networks, enabled them to manage their dual responsibilities. Likewise, the women in Loder's (2005) study perceived their extended family and spousal support

as a reason underpinning their career advancement. Their parents also worked with them to look after their children and meet their needs.

To understand how female head teachers, manage the dual responsibilities of being a leader and mother at the same time, Parker (2015) carried out a study in New York State on female principals who were mothers. Several coping strategies were employed by the participants; these included enjoying refreshment activities and using technological facilities for organizing duties. While the women head teachers missed having a work support system they cited receiving support from individuals in their social network such as their spouse, friends, and parents who provided assistance in childcare tasks.

As part of an international research project, Murakami and Törnsen (2017) interviewed two female secondary school head teachers from Sweden and Texas. The analysis found that their professional development was informed by 'root experiences from family, mentors, and co-workers, and by country specific policies and expectations' (p. 818). In Pakistan, the participants of Taj's (2016) study employed different strategies to manage their perceived challenges. These were trying to enhance their competencies academically and professionally, working collaboratively with their male colleagues, maintaining confidence with their skills, and seeking assistance from their families.

Within the Arabian context, both similar as well as regionally specific influences have supported educational women to act effectively in their schools. For example, Arab women in Arar's (2018) study were empowered by their family support, strong personal characteristics, and willingness to improve social status. In the Eastern province

of the KSA, Mathis (2010) reported that while the vast majority of female head teachers were found to be motivated by their religious beliefs and encouragement given from students and parents, few received support from the MoE. The MoE's support was limited to simple letters of appreciation, which usually contain a statement to the effect of 'Thank you, we deeply appreciate your efforts'. These influencers helped the principals to fulfil their responsibilities and step forward to improve their schools.

Earlier life experiences and family involvement also form common influencers on women's competencies and skills in overcome leadership challenges, and these eventually help in being successful leaders. Madsen (2007a, p. 2) insisted that 'all types of childhood experiences are critically important to an individual's growth and development… personal history represents a part of the present'. She interviewed 10 female university presidents to explore their childhood experiences. Her analysis found that the participants reported having been 'obedient and/or respectful, reflective, smart, self-directed, helpful, moderately to highly competitive, and concerned about pleasing and meeting the expectations of respected adults' (p. 7). Women educational leaders talked about enjoying their school life, attributing their current fulfilment to positive interactions with former teachers, and participation in school activities. While all participants addressed their parents as a prime influence on their development and growth, some of them acknowledged positive influences from their extended families.

Critical events and challenges during childhood were found to be a source of developing leadership competencies. Similar results were found among Madsen's participants in China (2010a) and in the United Arab Emirates (2010b). In both studies, the participants highlighted the influence of their childhood lives on their leadership abilities,

including upbringing styles, and interactions with parents, school teachers and peers. The unique influencers for Emirati women were their religious values and their birth order (Madsen, 2010b). It could be assumed that such influencers have a continuing impact on educational women leaders throughout their careers.

It is argued that children can develop various skills if appropriate upbringing is practiced which will ultimately influence their later lives (Madsen, 2007b). Women in a study by Moorosi (2010) recalled the role played by their fathers in their lives who stand out in most of the findings due to their domineering role in homes compared to the 'silent' and 'supportive' role of mothers. Most of the women had to overcome their difficult pasts through a reliance on existing social constructions of their nature as women. However, the experiences that tend to show early evidence of strong leadership skills even in a difficult environment are similar to cases presented by Moorosi (2010) in an African context. Critical aspects of early childhood included the support, or the lack of same, provided by family members as well as the early school experiences. The study underscored the women's choice of their fathers as the motivators.

The studies reviewed suggest that educational women leaders typically employ different strategies to deal with leadership challenges. However, there is limited research on women who have taken on educational leadership roles in KSA specifically at secondary schools in the capital city. There is also an absence of research on the coping strategies used by Saudi women leaders. Furthermore, only a very limited number of international studies, and no local research, that utilize the life history method appear in the existing literature on female leaders' roles. My study examines the impact of the social

construction of participants' gender on women leaders in secondary school in Saudi Arabian context.

From the discussion above it can be concluded that role and extent of the involvement of women in leadership positions is complex. As literature shows, they face a range of challenges and barriers in effectively running educational institutions. Nevertheless, they attempt to meet this adversity in a number of ways. The nature of the leadership of women could be further explored through the framework of leadership theories.

3.11 Contribution of this study to the literature

Although different perspectives and results are presented in the above literature review covering various nations and cultures, some key issues most relevant to this research should to be highlighted which also support the focus of my research. Firstly, the Saudi social cultural and educational system is quite unique, a factor that is under-emphasised in the existing literature. Further, the vast majority of studies were conducted in Western countries, where the situation is quite different from the Middle East (Arar and Mustafa, 2011; Celikten, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2010; Samier, 2015). This implies that detailed consideration of the local context of the study is invaluable, in this case the Saudi Arabian context, which has its own peculiarities that should be taken into account. Therefore, given the unique socio-cultural context and education system, my interest was in understanding 'how this affects the early childhood and schooling experiences' and also 'how this affects the leadership roles'.

However, my focus is on female educational leaders. Thus, my first research question arose as 'how did early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female head teachers' journeys towards leadership?' Further, because of the particularities of the socio-cultural context, Saudi Arabia has a segregated education system which is expected to have an effect on leadership since leadership is contextual (see section 3.2). In addition, as my focus is on female leaders, both how gender is socially constructed and resultant impact on leadership are my interest. As a result, the other two research questions arose, 'in what way did the social construction of the participant's gender impact upon their journeys and experiences of leadership?' and 'what are the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they face in their journeys towards leadership in respective schools?'. My focus on these aspects is a result of the literature reviewed above, coupled with my personal and professional experience of the context of Saudi Arabia. My research approach has also been influenced by other observations made in the literature (such as number of participants, general approach taken, covering only one phase of participants' life, not covering Arab context) discussed herein.

Secondly, as will be discussed further in Chapter 4 below, the sample sizes in most of the studies is relatively small, not usually exceeding six participants. My research captures the life stories and leadership experiences of twelve female head teachers (see section 4.5). I, therefore, intended to go beyond previous studies in obtaining rich data for analysis. Thirdly, despite the existence of some research on female leadership in KSA contexts (e.g. Abalkhail, 2017; Alakarni, 2014; Alsweel, 2009; Rajasekar and Beh, 2013), these have often been quite general in their approach, and thus do not delve deeper into the life journeys and experiences of the participants. These studies,

arguably, only address the surface aspects of female leadership. Fourthly, there are very few studies that have examined women in educational leadership positions within the Arabian context, particularly with regard to their life journeys to school headship careers and their experiences of being in those positions.

Further, a review of the literature on leadership theories (see section 3.3) which may be applicable to these headship roles shows a general lack of empirical research in the context of Saudi female head teachers. Thus, my study makes a further contribution in this respect as more research needs to be done in this area in light of leadership theories. Finally, from my extensive review of the literature on KSA, no study exists that has investigated the life histories of female principals in secondary schools in KSA. Thus, my study contributes to filling the lacuna in the existing research on female principals in secondary schools in KSA. It also makes a contribution to the growing research on female leadership in the Middle East in shedding light on the specifics of the Saudi Arabian context. Furthermore, it contributes to the existing literature on leadership styles and highlights the applicability of existing leadership theories to a non-western context. My study, in illuminating the experiences of women in educational leadership positions from their early childhood to their current positions also contributes to exposing the challenges and barriers that exist in female leadership in general and in the context of Saudi Arabia. This exposition of the challenges, hindrances or barriers not only contributes to the extant literature, but may also help in the formulation of mechanisms to overcome the challenges that female principals face, for instance through a change in government policy.

3.12 Summary

Although the literature acknowledges that female education has significantly developed (Al-suwaihal, 2010; Arar et al., 2013; Omair, 2008; Robinson et al., 2017), most evidence still points to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Arar, 2018; Khattab and Ibrahim, 2006; Lumby and Azaola, 2014; Oplatka and Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006; World Bank, 2018). Women who aspire to leadership positions are affected by multiple factors including gender, ability, age, class, ethnicity, race, culture, religion and politics (i.e. the intersectionality), with the focus of my study being on gender. Further, even when women successfully manage to become leaders, they are still susceptible to challenges arising from these factors. It is enlightening to observe how these challenges have motivated some leaders to prove their abilities to lead. The reviewed literature has also presented numerous coping strategies and influences which have empowered women to carry out leadership responsibilities and make a difference/change in their workplaces. While some of these are personal factors such as family members, individual characteristics, and life experiences, others are organisational or institutional factors such as colleagues and formal institutional support mechanism.

Based on the critical review of the available literature, there is lack of research that has explored the life journey and experiences of Saudi women head teachers to their educational headship positions. Further, my study uses a life history approach, which has scarcely been used on women's educational leadership research in Arab societies, Saudi Arabia included. The life history approach is explained in the next chapter that discusses the methodological framework that will guide this research.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology approach used to conduct this research, justifying its choice and relevance to the study. First, I reiterate the research focus by outlining the research questions. This is followed by a discussion of the epistemological assumptions underlying social constructionism. The key propositions of social constructionism were discussed in section 3.5. A research paradigm basically represents a general set of philosophical assumptions which define the nature of possible research (Mingers and Brocklesby, 1997).

I then discuss the methodological choice, outlining the chosen qualitative research approach, which is consistent with the social constructionism paradigm. This is followed by a description of the data collection process, which includes a discussion of the life history approach using semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, I outline the participant selection process and the data analysis procedures, which utilised thematic analysis. Finally, I discuss the potential ethical issues connected with the research project and the promotion of research validity. A summary of the chapter is then presented. A reminder of the research focus is given next.

4.2 Research questions

This qualitative research, from a social constructionist perspective, aims to explore the journeys of women headteachers in girls' secondary schools in Saudi Arabia and their

experiences of being in a school headship position. The study answers the following research questions:

RQ1. How did the early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female head teachers' journeys towards leadership?

RQ2. In what way does the social construction of the participant's gender have an impact on their journeys towards and experiences of leadership?

RQ3. What are the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they face in their journeys towards leadership in their respective schools?

4.3 Epistemological assumptions

Philosophical perspectives play an important role in directing the researcher, from the choice of subject to analysing and interpreting the data (Newby, 2014). By reviewing my philosophical standpoints, the aim is to understand their interrelationships with the research and to adapt a relevant research methodology. Traditionally, there are two major philosophical considerations: epistemology and ontology. According to Denscombe (1998, p. 3), my research 'brings with it a set of assumptions about the social world it investigates.' As a result, each research choice has advantages and disadvantages that need to be considered.

Epistemology refers to the branch of philosophy concerned with studying the nature of knowledge and justification (Saunders et al., 2007; Schwandt, 2000) or the 'science or study of being' (Blaikie, 1993, p. 6) and the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality, whatever it is understood to be. In short, claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known' (p. 8). Epistemology addresses the issue of knowledge

that is, or ought to be, considered relevant to a discipline (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Proctor (2005), as such, argues that it is concerned with how the researcher can know things. Ontology, on the other hand, is more concerned with the nature of reality and things consisting of the reality (Slevitch, 2011). This study's ontological position is that reality is subjective and a product of individual consciousness (Saunders et al., 2012). This view of reality is associated with the anti-positivist, epistemological position adopted by constructionism. According to this epistemological stance, 'truth and meaning do not exist in some external world but are created by the subject's interactions with the world' (Gray, 2013, p. 20). Thus, reality, knowledge, truth and meanings are socially constructed (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Silverman, 2016). Therefore, in this epistemological stance, meaning is constructed such that subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. As a result, there could exist multiple, contradictory but equally valid, accounts of the world (Bryman, 2001). From this ontological and epistemological position, this study explores the social reality of the participants who were female head teachers in girls' secondary schools. In other words, my research aimed to understand the world from the female head teachers' points of view (Finkelstein, 2004) through their life stories in order to provide a better understanding of their roles as leaders in girls' schools.

I have decided to take a social constructionist stance in looking at the journeys and experience of female head teachers, across a broad time period, within their social context and focusing on their daily activities and interactions (Burr, 2003; Creswell 2007). As this research is written from a feminist viewpoint, this influences the research epistemology. In light of this, social constructionism allows me to examine the female head teachers' experiences, both from a political standpoint and how social

constructs, such as culture, determine their life history. The feminist epistemology and social constructionism is congruent with the aims of the research; it is concerned with exploring how women construct and interpret their experiences of being head teachers and how these constructions and interpretations are influenced by some aspects of identity; that is, family background, gender and social perspectives.

Although there is no particular feminist epistemology, many researchers have explored what constitutes a feminist epistemology. For example, Hartsock (cited in Hekman, 1997) claims 'feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women' (1981, p. 35). She adds that the feminist approach allows the researcher to draw connections between everyday life and the social constructs that shape it. According to Skeggs (1994), feminist research 'begins from the premise that the nature of reality in western society is unequal and hierarchical' (p. 77). Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) agree that feminist research has 'particular theoretical, political and ethical concerns that make these varied approaches to social research distinctive' (pp. 2-3).

Lather (1991, p. 71) argues that feminist research aims to shed light on the 'invisibility' and 'distortion' of the female experience in order to achieve equality in women's social position. Leadership theory, for example, reveals that the phenomenon is understood through a 'male norm' lens (for example Calas and Smircich, 1996; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Patterson et al., 2012) although researchers such as Patterson et al. (2012) and Galloway and Lesaux (2014) do seek to question the status quo. As a result, Fletcher (2004) argues that leadership is often presented as gender neutral. My research aims

to use social constructionism from a feminist standpoint to identify the female experience in a leadership position. Reality in this approach is viewed as not to be discovered but to be interpreted, the meanings being varied and multiple (Creswell, 2007). Taking a constructionist approach allowed me to examine the events, realties, meanings, and experiences that are related to the women head teachers, and how these components were the effect of a range of discourses operating within the Saudi context (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

As such, I understand that my interpretation of the female head teachers' life history needs to reflect how these women 'construct' their social worlds and how culture and being part of a male-dominated culture determines their professional role. As a woman who has worked in the education field as a teacher, I can see the findings through a feminist lens that remains grounded in my own life history and identity, and which has influenced the epistemological approach of this research. Although feminist researchers believed that the research is gender-oriented, other differences, including differences of economics, religion, politics, and knowledge cannot be ignored (Alcoff and Potter, 2013). As such, women's roles and identities are influenced by people's ideas about gender (Burr, 2003). For example, Burr (2003 p. 36) stated that 'prevailing discourses of femininity often construct women as, say, nurturant, close to nature, emotional, negatively affected by their hormones, empathic and vulnerable'.

All research runs the risk of failing to produce valid research, a risk I have attempted to circumvent by following a well-planned methodological outline. In the following section, I will discuss my research approach and justify the choices I made.

4.4 Qualitative Research

Based on the philosophical underpinnings explained above and in order to meet the research objectives, this research was designed to be a qualitative study, using qualitative methods to collect and analyse the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, pp. 4-5) define qualitative research as ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world’ and ‘makes the world visible’. The main aim of utilising qualitative research methods is to study and interpret the research problem through the participants' views (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011). As May and Williams (2000) claim the qualitative approach is more interested in actions of people and the meanings that they give to their actions.

This research design is compatible with my study aim, which seeks to give better understanding of the experiences of women head teachers in Saudi Arabia. This design divulges meanings and concepts rather than generalising relationships (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011). Thus, qualitative methodology assists in concentrating on specific groups of people (female head teachers) in a social domain and across different disciplines (Yin, 2015). It is also more effective in understanding their roles within a real context (Snape and Spencer, 2003) through an exploration of their life histories. According to Patton (2002, p. 14), ‘qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability’.

Anderson (2010) adds that qualitative research can provide a better understanding of the research problem and gives multiple choices to explore it in greater depth. Therefore, a qualitative approach seemed appropriate for the study as it enabled me to investigate the issues addressed in the research questions in more detail and depth. As I was interested in understanding head teachers' perspectives rather than 'making standardized comparisons and accounting for variance' (Anderson, 2010, p. 1) the qualitative research methodology seemed most relevant to the conduct of the research.

Further, (Unger, 1983) states that feminist research generally criticises quantitative research as people are considered 'object-like subjects'. This is because quantitative research is directed at uncovering objective social truths (Silverman, 2016). Woolgar (1983) claims that quantitative research methods silence the participants' voice, which in turn undermines their experience. As my research aims to give Saudi female head teachers a voice rather than to put their stories into a generalized conceptual framework, the quantitative research method would not, ultimately, facilitate achievement of my research aim. The qualitative method, on the other hand, allowed me to reveal and understand the experiences of women in leadership roles and how their experiences constructed their points of view, thus 'realizing as fully as possible women's voices in data gathering and preparing an account that transmits those voices' (Olesen, 1994, p. 167).

4.5 Research Tool: Semi structured Life History Interviews

As I aimed to conduct research on the journeys and experiences of female head teachers in Saudi Arabia, it was crucial to choose the most appropriate research method. As

Bryman (2008) argues, understanding research methods allows appropriate choices to be made by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a particular method. This section explores the life history approach used for this study, and discusses its development, uses and limitations in light of qualitative methodology with an aim to provide a deeper understanding of this approach and argue for its appropriateness to achieve the objectives of the study.

The first challenge confronting those who wish to understand more about life history research is the problem of the differing use of terms associated with this approach, including narrative inquiry, biographical research, and life history, a problem compounded by their often-interchangeable usage (Roberts, 2002; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). The works of Hatch and Wisnieski (1995), Denzin (1998) and Roberts (2002) have very useful discussions of these terms as they compare and contrast the meaning, process and usage of these approaches. A narrative inquiry is similar to biographical research and is based on personal narratives. A life story, on the other hand, is the account of a person's full life or aspects of their life told to another person. It focuses on locating an individual's life story on the wider social, political and economic context. The length of this thesis does not allow for a detailed discussion of each of these terms. Rather I focus on developing an understanding of the term 'life history' as a method of qualitative research.

Life history is defined differently by various researchers (Atkinson, 1998; Cole and Knowles, 2001; Delamont, 2012; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.652) state that life history is 'an extensive autobiographical narrative, in either oral or written form, that covers all or most of a life'.

This definition focuses on the narrative aspect of the life history approach as a story told by an individual. Atkinson (1998) adds that life history is:

> the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of guided interview by another (p. 8).

This definition highlights that life history involves both the individual whose story is told and the researcher who is researching this life history. Therefore, it is a co-construction of knowledge that is shaped by the interviewer's identity as well as the interviewee. Plummer (1983) supports this view when he states that life history is an 'interactive and co-operative technique directly involving the researcher' (Plummer, 1983, cited in Cohen et al., 2008, p. 198).

In other definitions, context appears to be significant in understanding the life history approach. Cole and Knowles (2001, p. 11) state that life history is 'about understanding a situation, profession, condition or institution through coming to know how individuals walk, talk, live and work within that particular context' in order to 'gain insight into the collective'. This context can be 'personal, historical, social, institutional and or political' (Hatch and Wisniewski, 2002, p. 115). Dollard (1949, cited in Goodson and Sikes, 2001) supports this view that life history explores the relationship between individuals' lives, their culture, and the social structure in which they live. In the current study, I aimed to use the life history method to understand the larger socio-cultural, political and historical context in which my participants live, as well as to focus on perspectives regarding their role as leaders.

The life history approach became popular in the 1990s, gaining support, particularly from feminist researchers, who focused on examining the lives of female teachers that would otherwise have remained hidden from the public (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). More recently, there has been a revival of this method by postmodernists and post-structuralist through a focus on multiple levels of subjectivity, where the main focus is on investigating relationship between individual lives, culture and social structure (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). In the field of education, the life history approach has also gained momentum. Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that the lives of teachers, who are considered to be a marginalized group of society in terms of the power they have in their professional spheres, are being studied more in recent research contexts. This is evidenced by the increased number of studies appearing in the literature, for example, Hargreaves (1996), Hoskins (2012), Goodson (1992) and Middleton (1993, cited in Goodson and Sikes, 2001). This development in using the life history approach specifically to study the lives of teachers has shown that there is a strong link between the personal lives of teachers and its effects on their practice. As Goodson (2008, p. 3) argues, 'it is as if the teacher is her or his practice'. This interest in studying the private and public lives of teachers has led to empirical studies as well such as those focusing on teacher involvement in school policy (Woods, 1985), the agency of teachers in the development of the curriculum (Lawy and Tedder, 2009) and how head teachers frame their professional lives (Biott, Moos, and Møller, 2001).

Life history research is increasingly being utilised in a number of substantive areas such as in family studies, migration, political change and also education (Bird and Ojermark, 2011) owing to its focus on the voices of marginalized and fragmented groups whose voices are otherwise not heard (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). As such, it

is argued that researchers recognize 'the individual as a window into broader social and societal conditions' (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 12). For example, in the field of education, studying the lives of teachers may help to 'see the individual in relation to the history of her or his time' which allows the researcher to 'view the intersection of the life history with the history of society, thus illuminating the choices, contingencies, and options open to the individual' (Goodson, 2008, p. 14). Bogdan and Biklen (2007), on the other hand, argue that life histories can be used as a tool to help explain human behaviour rather than the history of a place. The use of the life history approach is, therefore, multi-dimensional. It can be used for studying an individual in their own right as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the surroundings they live in.

Educational researchers have often used the life history approach as a way to illustrate 'life's meaning and the role of caring for persons and how important it is for the teacher-researcher to take this quest' (Atkinson, 1998, p. 17). Atkinson's (1998) definition regarding participants' stories and narrative choices help explain the usefulness of the life history approach in the field of education. Atkinson notes that life histories are particularly useful for this question, because they are 'not the life experience itself but only a representation of it', such that 'we might say that telling a life story is a way of organizing experience and fashioning or verifying identity' (Atkinson, 1998, p. 11-12).

The life histories of my female participants from Saudi Arabia represented the stories they chose to share about various aspects of their private and professional lives, which depended on many factors, including their socio-cultural backgrounds and the envi-

ronment they were brought up in, as well as their willingness to participate in the current research project. The stories they told about their personal lives also helped shed light on other aspects of their professional lives, including their day-to-day interaction with staff and their role as a leader in their schools.

There is significant diversity in the ways that researchers can adapt the life history approach as a method of research. Miller (2000) has outlined a useful way to discern between the most common approaches. He suggests three ways to use this method, namely: through the use of a narrative that involves the construction of a unique life story as a result of the collaborative efforts of the interviewer and the interviewee; the realist and inductive approach using grounded theory through a series of interviews to identify themes and construct a new theory; and the neo-positivist approach, which tests existing theory against empirical data. Life history interviews can fill the gaps in understanding that other methods leave unfilled and may be used to validate and elaborate on previous research findings (Bird and Ojermark, 2011). For example, if the findings from a piece of research show that female teachers lack the power of leadership in their schools, the life history method can be adapted to conduct further research into why this happens over a long period of time. It can also help to provide insight into the wider social processes that shape their experiences. Regardless of the approach taken, it is argued that the analysis of life histories requires an understanding of the social context in which the participant functions (Van Onselen, 1993).

One of the advantages of using the life history method, which is commonly used in qualitative research, is its focus on the individual's experience, compared to other qualitative methods (Hatch and Wisniewski, 2002). Thus, one of the main uses of the

life history method is to gain the point of view and perspective of the researched in their own words. Bryman (2008, p. 440) points out that such an approach has 'clear strengths from the point of view of the qualitative researcher: its unambiguous emphasis on the point of view of the life in question and a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life'. This suggests that, for me, a researcher who wanted to explore the journeys and experiences of women and their position of power and leadership in schools in Saudi Arabia, such an approach provides a strong research framework that can guide how to study individual lives of female teachers as compared to a study of a collective group of teachers.

According to Goodson, an individual's sense of self is constructed by the individual on the basis of 'life experiences and background' (2008, p. 38), comprised of both a personal and professional dimension that are not mutually exclusive. Rather, as Zembylas (2003, p. 216) points out, 'teachers invest their selves in their work and so they closely merge their sense of personal and professional identity'. Hence, teachers' beliefs develop throughout their lifetimes and are influenced by a variety of factors, including events, experiences, particularly the wider political context framing their careers and other people in their lives (Knowles, 1992). Teachers' life experiences and background affect what they believe, and consequently, how they teach (Clark, 1992). Therefore, a life history approach enables me to understand a head teacher's life and work in terms of the meaning they have for the individual teacher (Butt et al., 1992; Denicolo and Pope, 1990; Kelchtermans, 1993; Woods, 1985). This approach can help in understanding teachers' involvement in and commitment to their teaching and their students (Feiman and Floden, 1981).

One of the strengths of using this approach for this study allowed such marginalised participants to feel empowered enough to share their experiences. Research also suggests that using a life history approach to study the lives and stories of teachers gives them voice which otherwise sometimes is unheard (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Indeed 'the notion of the teacher's voice is important in that it carries the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings, that are conveyed by the way a teacher speaks or writes' (Butt et al., 1992, cited in Goodson, 2008, p. 6). Hence using the life history approach was helpful in understanding the roles teachers play in the overall structure of the school. Furthermore, it shed light on the extent of their representation in the structure and reform policies of their schools.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) also point out that the life history method has great potential for a researcher depending on the objectives of the research. If a project aims to find out, for example, how teachers cope with certain policies and change in their schools or why they follow a certain teaching style, the life history method as a research tool can offer valuable insights and through the wider context which frames their experiences, help to answer these questions. This is because, they argue, teachers are influenced by their experiences and the relationships that have an impact on 'what they do and how they do it' in their professional work (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 22). For me, as a qualitative researcher exploring the journeys and experiences of educationalists such as the female head teachers in Saudi Arabia, the life history method proved to be a useful tool as it helps to answer the critical questions of 'how' and 'why', which are inherently qualitative in nature. It was also beneficial in addressing the question of what role they play as leaders in their schools and how they cope with the challenges they face (Hoskins, 2012).

As with other methods of qualitative research, adapting the life history approach poses challenges and dilemmas for a researcher. Goodson states that 'life histories are complex and often contradictory mechanisms' (2008, p. 89). On the one hand, they can provide a way for people to find themselves, understand who they are in the larger context of society, culture and history. On the other hand, he argues this can be highly dependent on people's class and gender, which are socially and historically constructed (Goodson, 2008). Thus, how a particular society influences and shapes its male members may be very different from how it might influence and shape its female members. This observation is crucially relevant to the Saudi Arabian context, where the socio-cultural set-up of the country affects and shapes women, and which in turn impacts their life histories and how they represent themselves. I found that studying the lives of women was challenging for me as a researcher using the life history approach, given the complexity of factors involved. These factors included overlapping cultural issues, participants' upbringing styles, and background. Although life history interviews can provide a breadth of knowledge and insight into an individual's life, because of the extensive period of time and events in their lives these interviews cover, participants may find it difficult to talk about such a wide time frame (Delamont, 2012). Another challenge of using life history interviews from a practical point of view is the amount of time spent on conducting long interviews and transcribing and analysing the data (Delamont, 2012, Bryman, 2008).

Goodson and Sikes (2001) state that if the participants chosen for the study are close acquaintances of the researcher, as might be selected through purposive and convenient sampling, then the researcher runs into the risk of potential negative consequences mainly from researcher bias. However, one of the key advantages in taking a purposive

sampling approach is the increased willingness of the interviewees to participate in this research. This is because in purposive sampling, participants are identified and selected based on qualities that they possess which puts them in a position of knowledge and/or experience. In this case, the approached and selected participants met the important criteria of being female head teachers in Saudi Arabian girls' secondary schools. Thus, female head teachers were approached and selected because of their knowledge and experience since the study is aimed at capturing their life journeys to the leadership position. Further, the selected female head teachers were those that were available and willing to participate. Also, by virtue of their qualities, the participants were able to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner giving this purposive sampling appropriate to the objectives of this research.

However, it should be acknowledged that when undertaking purposive sampling, some potential limitation could arise. Firstly, the data collected was only from those that were willing to participate. As such, different views/opinions from those headteachers that refused to participant were not captured. In using purposive sampling too, the final participants were all from one city (Riyadh) which raises issues about whether the locality could have influenced their perceptions and experiences. By its nature also, this nonprobability and non-random sampling technique remains highly vulnerable to selection bias and influences beyond the control of the research. This arises because of the technique's concentration on participants with particular characteristics/qualities who are better able to assist with fulfilling the research objectives. This is a positive aspect; however, it can also lead to sharing highly confidential, private and personal information (Cohen et al., 2008).

Furthermore, Goodson and Sikes (2001, p. 92) argue that the ethical standards of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy are challenged when conducting life history interviews 'because of the personal and idiosyncratic information that is involved... it may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee total anonymity without substantially altering accounts'. This means adapting the life history approach for my research study had such implications. As a researcher, I had to be extremely cautious because of the intensity of the involvement to ensure my research participants would not be negatively affected. They were protected at all times, especially considering they are female teachers from a country where their private and professional lives may be affected negatively. For example, I adopted the practice of regularly reminding all the participants during interview that, if they didn't want to answer they were free to do so. I had to delete some shared information that one of the head teachers felt she did not want to be included, pertaining to one of her personal experiences with her ex-husband disclosed in her interview. The participant asked me to delete it after we had concluded the interview as she felt uncomfortable sharing it with the public as it might be used to identify her. Having deleted the relevant information, I further sent her the complete transcript of her interview to enable her to check and amend to ensure her privacy. In the event, she did not change anything else, expressing her appreciation for the transparency and trust entailed by this opportunity and freedom to check.

It is vital to remember that not everyone enjoys telling their story. This depends partly on the nature of the community in which interviews are situated, and on what the process of recalling and recounting uncovers or resurrects. This means that a process that may be empowering for some might be exploitative or at least unpleasant for others.

As a researcher who has explored the utility of the life history approach for my proposed study of female teachers in Saudi Arabia, this point was a significant consideration. In a society where women's roles are linked with the home more than with leading a professional career, the voices of female teachers could reveal events from their personal lives which might not be welcomed and encouraged in their personal relationships, as supported by Goodson and Sikes's (2001) discussion on marginalized groups. In addition, since the participants involved belong to a marginalized gender in (male-dominated) Saudi Arabian society, the empowerment female teachers in schools might obtain as a result of this study, when made available to the respective educational institutions, might impact negatively on their lives.

Other key issues that needed to be clarified when considering the use of the life history method as a tool of research (Bird and Ojermark, 2011) included the need to conduct the interview in the interviewee's mother tongue. This is especially relevant to my research in a Saudi Arabian context, where English is not the first language of my prospective participants. In addition, particular consideration needed to be given to the number of researchers involved, and whether these should be specialist researchers or local non-specialists, such as trained but inexperienced members of local communities. In my study, I was the main and only researcher who met and interviewed the recruited sample.

These questions suggested that the choices a qualitative researcher makes while designing a study based on the life history method have strong implications for the presentation and analysis of the data and consequently on the findings of the study.

Therefore, I made careful choices of how to plan such a project and took into consideration those questions which would be relevant to my study. However, since the life history approach is a popular methodology within the context of feminist research and gender studies (Goodson and Sikes, 2001), it was appropriate for research with women such as those in my study. Precisely how these participants fitted this research methodology, and their suitability for inclusion in such a study, is therefore outlined in full in the next subsection followed by the data collection procedure I used.

4.6 Participants

The population of this study included female head teachers in secondary schools in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. To gain data relevant to topics of interest (Cressell, 2007), those head teachers who were selected were the only potential participants in a position to assist in answering the research questions and achieve the study objectives. Only female head teachers were selected for the study owing to the segregated nature of Saudi society. Due to the separation between men and women, it was rare to encounter any direct interactions between the two genders (Hamdan, 2005) and I had to recruit women only.

As there are no specific rules to determine the number of participants in qualitative research, 'the meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size' (Patton, 2002 p. 245). However, some researchers (Morse, 1995; Leininger, 1994; Morse et al., 2002) suggest that data saturation is a rule and is set as a criterion for qualitative research.

According to Bernard and Bernard (2012), it is difficult to identify the number of interviews required to achieve data saturation as it depends on the research and the researcher. Essentially, Bernard and Bernard (2012) argues that the researcher should aim to take whatever information they can get. Guest et al. (2006) adds that by asking the same questions to multiple participants, the researcher is able to achieve data saturation. Davis (2006) points out that although the life history approach tends to focus on a small sample, each interview covers a number of variables and moments in time. Hence in the case of teachers, this might include, as Delamont (2012) suggests, the age of the participants, the period of their lives being researched, and categories structured around the main events of their lives, such as education, work and family history.

While considering the kind of sampling, I decided to first approach the Ministry of Education in order to recruit my participants through them. However, I had encountered severe difficulties with the bureaucratic procedures in place at the Ministry of education in my earlier study. Therefore, I had to seek an alternative approach to recruiting my participants, using my own social network. This process proved more practical in Saudi Arabia's segregated society, where women play a limited role compared to their male counterparts. Indeed, this method is widely used in research, especially in relation to marginalised populations (Noy, 2008). An advantage of using this method is that all of the marginalised participants can be selected despite the fact that the sample size is small. Moreover, since I did not have to seek permission from the Ministry of Education, I found that my participants felt less pressure and were able to express themselves more freely than they might have done if the Ministry of Education had arranged for them to be interviewed for the study. They might think that the min-

istry would track their responses to the interview questions by returning to the interview records, and accordingly risk official consequences for information or opinions disclosed in confidence.

The recruitment process involved contacting some of my old acquaintances from my master's degree research, who then introduced me to other head teachers, one of whom provided me with a list of contact details of some of her colleagues. I contacted everyone I could, receiving varied responses: some agreed to be interviewed, some were reluctant and wanted more details, and others declined my request. My sample consisted of a range of ages, educational backgrounds, marital status, length of service and years of headship experience. Table 2 provides details for each participant. Eventually, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted in twelve different schools in Riyadh, as discussed in detail in the section on interview process below.

Head teacher name	Age	Years of teaching ex-perience	Years of headship experience	Educational level	Marital status
Sarah	50	10	15	Bachelor	Married
Wadad	42	12	8	Bachelor	Divorced
Ebtisam	45	4	15	Bachelor	Married
Hanan	46	16	7	Bachelor	Married
Hasna	50	12	16	Bachelor	Married
Reem	37	8	7	Bachelor	Divorced
Sabah	43	6	7	Bachelor	Married
Modi	45	10	12	Bachelor	Married
Haifa	47	7	8	Bachelor	Married
Manal	45	15	8	Bachelor	Married
Halema	47	10	11	Bachelor	Divorced
Lyla	50	4	19	Bachelor	Married

Table 2: Demographic information about women head teachers

4.7 Data Collection Procedures

Delamont (2012) states that the collection of data for a life history depends on the aims and objectives of the research undertaken. She argues that if the aim is to gain individuals' accounts of their lives, then the structured interview may be too imposing on the participants to open up and share their experiences. Hence, in the case of my research on female teachers in Saudi Arabia, I did not opt for the structured interview as I

wanted my participants to engage more freely and openly about the various stages of their personal and professional lives (Hoskins, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection tool adapted for this research. It was used in the field of education for researching teachers' experiences (Borg, 2006) similar to the participants of my study. Patton (2002, p. 278) suggests that the purpose of this kind of interviewing is 'to find out what is in and on someone else's mind'. Seidman (2006, p.14) describes this method as 'a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues'. Thus, the semi-structured interview seemed appropriate to investigate the experiences and perspectives of female head teachers in secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Semi-structured interviews are widely used to answer qualitative questions, such as 'why and how'. As my study is a qualitative piece of research which addressed the challenges faced by female head teachers, it enabled me to explore the reasons and extent of the issues they face in their schools.

In addition, the flexibility of this kind of interview allows for the issues emerging from the interviews to be explored in detail (Al-Zyoud, 2011; Miles and Gilbert, 2005) and enables sample members a greater opportunity to express their opinions frankly and in depth (Zanting et al., 2003). In semi-structured interviews, 'the interviewer might reword, re-order or clarify the questions to further investigate topics introduced by the participant' (Tong et al., 2007, p. 351). In the case of my female participants this proved to be particularly useful as I was able to gently prompt them to share their

experiences, which may not have been possible if other kinds of data collection methods, such as questionnaires, had been used. Therefore, semi-structured interviews allowed for rich data to be collected more easily than if other methods had been used. Although there are certain advantages of using semi-structured interviews, the method poses specific challenges for the researcher, which are considered in this study. Cohen et al. (2008) summaries some of these limitations, for instance, asking leading questions, which may encourage a particular answer from the participants and result in bias. In order to reduce such bias, I avoided asking leading questions and instead opted for more guided or general questions. It is suggested that a researcher should try not to 'contaminate an interviewee's report of their activities and experiences' (Edwards and Holland, 2013, p. 15). In this regard, I tried to remain neutral and objective to the participants' responses to my questions. Further, I attempted to gain clarification from my participants on the intended meaning of their interview responses by sharing my interview transcripts with them.

The collaborative encounter between interviewee and interviewer may affect the research findings in terms of interpretation and analysis (Cohen et al., 2008; Bird and Ojermark, 2011). These researchers argue that how data is collected, analysed and presented will depend on whether the interviewer has an insider or outsider's perspective on the issues discussed. Both perspectives have their merits and shortcomings (Miles and Crush, 1993). If the interviewer has an insider's perspective, as in my case in the context of Saudi Arabia where I have familiarity with and share in the common history of the community, this may consequently affect my analysis and findings from the research.

The issue of reliability and validity is another concern for the researcher employing semi-structured interviews as a research method (Bamball and While, 1994) and the life history approach. Plummer (1983) suggests that reliability checks can be put in place by the researcher to increase the reliability of interviews such as interviewing other informants or comparing with written sources to verify and cross-check the data produced (cited in Cohen et al., 2008). Reliability was ensured in my study by preparing some guiding questions, which were addressed to all participants, and comparing their responses (Edwards and Holland, 2013) (see section 4.11 also).

Due to the subjective nature of a life history interview, the validity of such interviews is also challenged since it is an individual's personal experience and opinion about a situation or context. For me as a qualitative researcher, this poses a problem as to what can be considered 'legitimate research data' (Cohen et al., 2008, p. 200). Using the life history method to conduct my research on female head teachers in Saudi Arabia posed similar issues of validity for the interviews I conducted, since the participants shared a wide range experiences from their lives. In addition, since the researcher is 'an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding' (Patton, 2002, p. 40), the experiences of the participants, the validity of such interviews may be called into question. In response to this issue, I built a friendly relationship with my participants before data collection, explaining the interview process and establishing my rapport with them prior to and during the interview process, as discussed below (Section 4.10).

4.8 The Interview Process

I carried out the study via two rounds of interviews with a break in between, which allowed me to review the results of the first round and to remedy any apparent limitations before the second round. All interviews were conducted in Arabic as it was the native and preferred language of the participants. I recorded and transcribed immediately following the interviews.

I informed all participants that the interviews were going to be recorded, to which two participants showed resistance. Being sensitive to the issue, I gently reiterated my reasons for requesting the recording and assured its safety. However, only one of the two initially reluctant participants agreed, and the other participant only agreed that I take field notes during the interview. However, as a life history interview requires focused attention on the part of the listener, and this being extremely difficult to do whilst taking down detailed and comprehensive notes, I decided not to use this interview. I managed instead to find another head teacher who consented to her interview being recorded. The rest of the interviews were conducted as planned. While conducting the interviews, I also wrote down notes. Previous research into this methodology has suggested that this enables me '(1) to check if all the questions have been answered, (2) [to be covered] in case of malfunctioning of the tape recorder, and (3) [to be covered] in case of malfunctioning of the interviewer' (Opdenakker, 2006, p. 3-4).

After analysing the initial round of interviews, it became apparent that some codes were saturated and that significant points required additional investigation, which I took into account in the second round of interviews. The duration of each interview

was between 90 minutes and 120 minutes depending on the length of the participants' responses. This amount of time was sufficient to cover all the necessary topics relevant to the research questions.

In order to conduct the interviews, I arranged a convenient time and location with the participants prior to the interviews. They were given consent forms along with an explanation of what was expected of them during the interviews (see Appendix B). This included their permission for recording the interviews along with an assurance from me that the recordings would be password protected and destroyed after transcription. I reiterated the participants' right to refuse to answer any given questions or even to withdraw from the interview and emphasized that all data would be kept confidential. To ensure their anonymity, I specified clearly that they would not be identified at any stage of the research process through the use of their real names.

To create a comfortable and trusting atmosphere for the participants during each interview, I tried to build and maintain a rapport with them throughout the interviews. I did this by following some strategies suggested by Dawson (2006) and Seidman (2006), such as speaking less and listening more, tracking participants' responses, offering clarifications and/or re-phrasing questions when participants expressed confusion, and composing extra questions to gain a clearer response. This enabled me to break down any issues that may have existed between the participants and myself and, as a result, they were able to express themselves more freely and openly. It was interesting to observe that during the interviews, most participants chose to call me 'akht' (meaning 'my sister' in Arabic), a term that indicates the speaker's level of comfort, trust and acceptance towards another person. In line with Bryman's (2008) suggestion, during

and after each interview, I made field notes to record body language and other contextual information that were missed out in the audio recordings.

To ensure that the interviews covered all necessary topics highlighted in the existing literature and, more importantly, to guide me to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2008, Dawson, 2006), an interview schedule was prepared with interview questions to be used as a guideline (see appendix G). However, the order and style of the questions were not fixed and there was flexibility in asking follow-up questions depending on the participants' responses. The questions on the interview schedule were developed following the research questions and the objectives of my study.

4.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis began immediately following data collection, with the transcription and review of the first round of interviews and a reflection of the data which led to the second round based on the gap in data requiring further investigation. Thematic analysis which is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79), was used for this purpose. This section justifies the choice of this method and describes the process of thematic analysis.

It is argued that thematic analysis is a more open and exploratory method of analysing qualitative data, as compared to other methods of analysis including narrative and content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Its use enables me to identify common themes and differences within the data, offering a rich and detailed account of the data. The

rationale for choosing thematic analysis for this study was that it offered sufficient transparency to compare and contrast the participants' experiences.

As previously stated, the interviews were semi-structured, recorded and conducted in Arabic to allow the maximum depth and clarity of expression. It is crucial to note that I had initially considered using the data management tool, NVivo, but unfortunately, I was unable to do so due to its incompatibility with Arabic which is written from right to left. According to King (2004, p. 263), Nvivo assists the researcher to identify patterns and themes in the collected data and draw relationships between the themes. Although this may have been useful in making the management of the data easier, I did not use NVivo for my data analysis as it was deemed neither necessary nor practical when considering the nature of my data. The data set was not translated into English as I believed that culturally specific terms or concepts might be altered or lost in translation. Phillips (1960) believes that 'almost any utterance in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings, and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of but that the field worker, as an outsider, usually is not' (p. 291). As such, when translating, the reader's understanding of the text might rely more on their own experiences. Taking this into account, I only translated one interview into English which has been included in this thesis (see Appendix G)

The process of carrying out thematic analysis involves the following decisions that need to be made by the researcher before starting the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006):

- Identification of themes: A theme is an implicit topic that organises a group of repeating ideas (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2007) which suggests

that it should related to the research aims and questions rather than the most dominant elements across a data set. For the purpose of this study, a thematic unit was considered to be a concept that would advance understanding of the situation and of the experiences of female head teachers in girls' secondary schools in KSA.

- Description versus a detailed account: As my participants' views on the topic were unknown (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I aimed for a rich thematic account of the entire data set as compared to a more balanced description to provide a sense of the most significant themes for the reader.

- Inductive versus theoretical thematic analysis: I identified patterns within the data using an inductive method rather than doing it theoretically as there were no pre-existing coding frames or analytic preconceptions.

- Semantic or latent themes: I aimed to identify themes at a latent level by examining the content of the data and searching for meaning in the data.

The thematic analysis approach can be divided into six phases, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) and depicted in table 3 below.

Phase	Brief description of the process
1. Becoming familiar with the data	I transcribed the interviews and wrote down my field notes, followed by reading and re-reading all the data many times.
2. Generating initial codes	I coded the most significant patterns within the data, systematically, across the entire data set, and collated data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	I collated codes into potential themes and gathered all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	I checked whether themes worked in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2).
5. Defining and naming themes	The analysis continued until the specifics of each theme were refined and the overall story of the analysis was told. Clear definitions and a name for each theme were produced.
6. Writing up findings	This phase was the final opportunity for analysis. Example extracts were selected, and the analysis was linked to the research questions and literature. Four chapters were produced to tell the overall story of the data.

Table 3: Phases of thematic analysis

Source: adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87)

Details of these six phases are provided below:

Phase One: Becoming familiar with the data

This phase involved transcribing all the interviews and comparing them with the field notes taken during the interviews. As I conducted and transcribed the interviews myself in Arabic, my native language, I had the advantage of being aware of the subtleties of meanings my participants wanted to express, which may have been lost had the

interviews been translated into English. In addition, the motivation to identify key themes and the awareness of similarities and differences among participants' experiences (Bryman, 2008) gave me a better position to analyse the data in greater detail and depth, as I was closer to the raw data.

Phase Two: Generating initial codes

To gain an understanding of the data, coding was used after multiple readings of the transcripts. Coding is 'the process of noting what is interesting, labelling it and putting it into appropriate files' (Seidman, 2006, p. 125). It involves organising the text of a transcript in order to discover patterns within its structure and in the meanings the participants give to certain elements they deem important (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003), insofar as they relate to the research questions. For this study, coding involved breaking down the data into distinct sections and identifying and categorising units of meaning. As I went through the whole text, I extracted relevant sections from the interviews and titled these textual segments with appropriate labels. Labels that appeared on multiple occasions were given a code, and after a long list of codes had been built, more general study themes began to emerge (see Appendix E).

Phase Three: Searching for themes

It is argued that for a qualitative researcher identifying themes is the primary task in the analysis of data, regardless of the approach they use (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Accordingly, I began determining how codes could combine to form themes. As the potential themes seemed large and complex, they were broken down into sub-themes by sorting the codes identified in the previous phase into groups of codes based on shared attributes. Each code was combined with relative codes and each group of codes

was also combined with a relative group to form a sub-theme which was given an appropriate name. The sub-themes were then collated in order to analyse broader meanings and major themes. To sort different codes into sub-themes and themes, tables were used (table 4) is an example of this process.

Codes	**Sub-theme**	**Main theme**
Ongoing experience Social relationships and *wasta* Family support Personal merits	Positive influencers	Headship experiences

Table 4: Hierarchical development of themes

Phase Four: Reviewing themes

In this phase, the codes, potential sub-themes and main themes were reviewed by re-reading all data and re-checking relevant texts. Similar codes were merged to avoid redundancy (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and to form an overarching theme. I went through the entire data set and all codes multiple times until I felt that no further amendment was needed. The purpose of this reviewing process was to ensure that codes were connected to the data and there was coherence in the themes.

Phase Five: Defining and naming themes

The data was reviewed in this phase and a few codes were classified more clearly for consistency. The codes and sub-themes were re-labelled as necessary to reflect features they dealt with (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes were further refined to ensure that each sub-theme told a clear story. Figure 3 below shows the identified main themes, the associated sub-themes and details how these are connected together to provide an account of the experiences of female head teachers in the leadership process

in secondary school in KSA. The three main themes have been used to organise the discussion of the findings in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

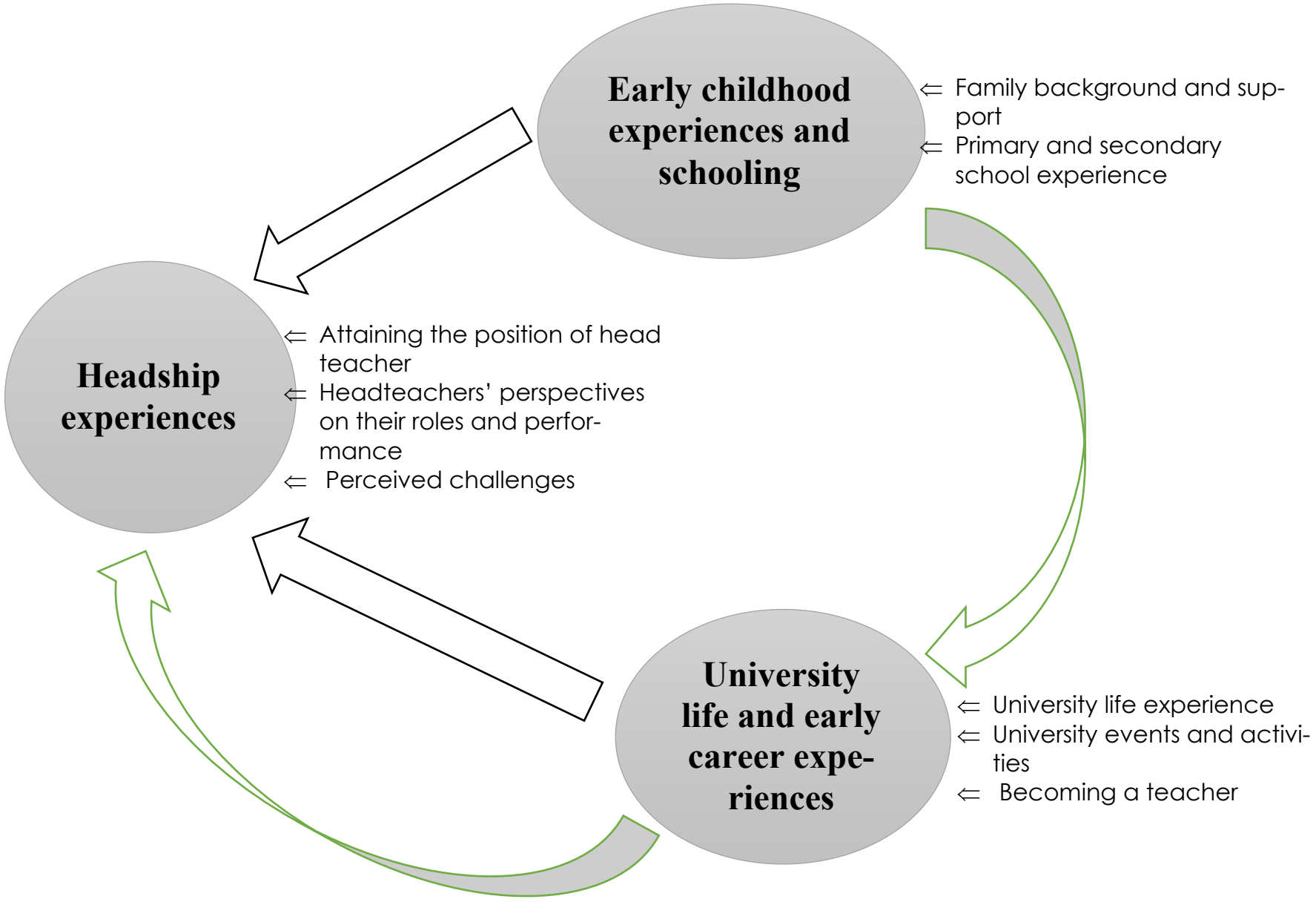

Figure 3: Major themes and related sub-themes

4.10 Ethical Considerations

A number of steps were taken in advance to ensure that the privacy of the participants was respected and protected at all times, in compliance with the ethical regulations set out in the BERA guidelines (2011). I also adhered to the approved instructions of the ethics form issued by the University of Roehampton (see appendix E) in preparing a consent form and debriefing form in advance (see appendices A & C), which was given to the participants. On this consent form (see appendix A), I included the title of the study, the objectives of the study, the study tool (life history interviews) and the rights of the participants.

It was made clear to the participants that they had the full right to withdraw from the interview anytime they wished. In addition, as a Saudi woman, I was fully aware of cultural differences. Importantly, exploring the life history of head teachers requires trust and confidentiality which are necessary to build a good research relationship. Thus, the following steps were taken before and during the interviews. Firstly, I talked to the head teachers about the study and its objectives of conducting the life history interviews. Secondly, I clarified to all participants that their names and institutions would not be mentioned. In addition, I explained to them that their participation in this study was optional and would not affect their work.

Finally, I ensured that the head teachers had a sufficient amount of time to read and sign the consent form. In addition, I explained the consent form verbally to them giving them full opportunity to ask questions about the research. All of the completed and signed consent forms were collected after the interviews. To ensure that all of the data

remained confidential and safe and to protect the raw data, two steps were taken. Firstly, all of the data was transcribed into Arabic and two of the interviews were translated into English and typed in Microsoft Word files, and then saved using a private password. Secondly, no unauthorized person or party was allowed to access this data.

Regardless of the approach taken, researchers will almost always confront a host of ethical issues in conducting life history research and disseminating the findings. Bird and Ojermark (2011) discuss some important questions that may arise. Since research takes up the participants' time, it has to be pursued in the most effective manner.
It is also important to consider how the researcher approaches the participants' anonymity and masks their identity. This is important given that having detailed knowledge or information about the participants essentially puts the researcher into a powerful situation (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) which requires that ethical rigorousness is upheld to the uttermost. In addition, the responsibility the researcher holds towards the community is another vital question that needs to be addressed. The researcher has to consider what approach to use when giving feedback on the findings of the study locally, sub-nationally, nationally, regionally or internationally.

Thus, aware of the importance of ethics, I had to address the problems of representations, my positionality and the overall authenticity (validity, trustworthiness) of the research process which are discussed next.

4.11 Research validity

As the study adopted a qualitative research approach. It was essential to implement a set of criteria to meet some criticisms and to ensure its quality through establishing 'trustworthiness. Kvale (2008, p. 120) argues that these issues go 'beyond technical or conceptual concerns and raise epistemological questions of objectivity of knowledge and the nature of interview research'. Thus, obtaining trustworthy and valid data using the qualitative interview is subjective. Nonetheless, several techniques have been proposed in the literature on 'why', 'what' and 'how' this aspect can be addressed (Kvale, 1996; Miles and Huberman, 1994). I have employed these recommended techniques in the research process, some examples being discussed below. Thus, as Kvale (1996, p. 242) argues, 'achieving validity in the research process is not: some final verification or product control; verification is built into the research process with continual checks on the credibility, plausibility and trustworthiness of the findings'. Accordingly, research validity techniques have been applied at the different stages of this research in a continuous manner. Thus, as Kvale (2008, p. 123) suggests, I continuously checked, questioned and theorised my data set and subsequent analysis in order to maintain a 'continual process of validation' that 'permeated the entire research process'.

Further, with respect to generalisability, this research was not aimed at offering any researcher-based discussions of analytical generalisability, instead, it sought to give 'reader based' opportunities for generalisability whereby the reader 'on the basis of detailed contextual descriptions of an interview study, judges whether the findings may be generalised to a new situation' (Kvale, 2008, p. 127). In doing this, I agree

with Stanley and Wise's (1993, p. 115) argument that I must avoid turning my participants' real and 'lived experiences into generalised mush' when telling their life stories.

Therefore, my provision of 'high quality descriptions of the interview process and products' (Kvale, 2008: 127) together with my awareness of validity and generalisability concerns throughout the research process from the conceptual stage to the completion stage gives rigor to my data collection and analysis. As amply put by Kvale (2008, p. 124), this rigor of my data collection and subsequent analysis arises because of the 'quality of the craftsmanship in checking, questioning and theorizing the interview findings that leads to knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they, so to speak, carry the validation with them, like a strong piece of art'

Some techniques recommended in the literature (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Miles and Huberman, 1994) that I have applied, include, for instance, the provision of rich detailed descriptions of my study findings, which are discussed in the three analysis chapters 5 to 7. This includes, in particular, the provision of translated 'verbatim' quotes of the participants which represent the actual translated views or comments of the participants. In doing this, I reduce my own bias and show transparency with respect to how the interpretation of the representations were arrived at (but see politics of representation below). This strengthens the qualitative research findings (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). I also describe in detail the research design and process, which might provide a reference for future research to use (Shenton, 2004) (but see generalizability point above). This provides an additional level of

transparency to the research process and thus could allow others to evaluate the research practices, method, and their effectiveness (Shenton, 2004). I also used a technique of member checking (also called participant validation, or informant feedback) that refers to checking with participants after the transcription process whether they would like to comment on, and give their impressions and confirmation of, their interviews (Bryman, 2008; Creswell and Miller, 2000). This is important as it promotes the authenticity or trueness of what was spoken in the interviews. Such checks do enhance the credibility and validity of the research data overall (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Thomas, 2017) (see 4.11.3 also).

The research validity and transparency has also been enhanced through the supervision process. Transparency was enhanced through making the data collection and data analysis process open to the supervisors. Accordingly, I was advised and pointed to the right direction by my supervisors throughout all of my research stages. For example, when my supervisors checked the analysis of my first-round interviews, they asked for more data to be collected as some lines of inquiry needed to be explored in greater depth. Further, as stated above (Section 4.8), they advised me that some codes were better, others saturated and that some significant points needed additional investigation. This ongoing supervision helped me in amending deficiencies in the research process and altered the categorisation to derive the main themes. Whilst the supervisors provided a form of 'peer debriefing' to the research process, I also requested a colleague to act as a peer reviewer, playing 'devil's advocate' and asking difficult questions about methods and interpretations (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

Further, in consideration of the research validity (or authenticity, trustworthiness), sufficient attention should also be given to the inherent politics of representation, my positionality in the research and the need to take a reflective account of the research process. These aspects are discussed next.

4.11.1 Politics of representation

In respect to the politics of representation, there is a possible threat of the researcher representing the participants' views in a multitude of potentially conflicting ways when selecting extracts of data from lengthy interview transcripts. Thus, whilst I have provided the translated 'verbatim' quotes of the participants which represent their actual translated views or comments, I had the power to decide on what to include and omit from their experiences and stories. In this regard, depending on which excerpts of data that are selected, this could give rise to multiple and possibly conflicting representations thereby elevating some views and silencing others. This selection of participants' representations is therefore, both subjective and complex since researchers as Kirsch (1999, p. 46) argues 'are implicated in the process of speaking for others, potentially silencing them. And in this silence, representation can become misrepresentation, the reinforcement of unjust power structures and institutional hierarchies'. Further, since a researcher is implicated in the process of speaking for others, this adds a moral responsibility for faithfully representing the participants' politic and practices (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). In discharging this moral responsibility for a faithful portrayal of the participants' views, considering the multiple and diverse interpretations that each life story account offered, my focus was on the participants' construction of their objective accounts of journeys to headship positions. My participants, and

therefore female educational leaders, are considered to be the ones to benefit from this research in giving voices (not silencing them) from the excerpts selected. This consideration is important as Kirsch (1999, p. 46) highlights that 'we must begin to take responsibility for our representations of others by examining who benefits from the research we conduct, whose interests are at stake and what the potential consequences are for participants involved in our studies'.

4.11.2 Positionality in the research process

Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that researchers are implicated in the subject of their research and the consequences of particular ways of seeing both themselves as writers, and the subject. As a result, I needed to consider my positionality within this research since my social class, gender and experiences have an effect on the research process and the subsequent write up. My awareness of the participants' culture, background and traditions greatly helped to establish the rapport needed to talk, in some cases, about difficult aspects of the participants' lives. As mentioned in Section 4.7 above, this rapport was built with the recruited participants in order to encourage them to speak freely and frankly (Shenton, 2004), a key consideration when acknowledging that my research entailed making participants' voices heard, not my own. In an endeavour to do this, I had constantly to step back and review the research process objectively, aware of my own beliefs or suppositions, so as to take a critical look at my own role in the research process. Being aware of my own beliefs or suppositions was important as it helped 'to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views' and also helped 'to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research' (Griffith, 1998, p. 133). In this respect, throughout the research process, I acknowledged

my identity and considered how this could have impacted my research and writing process. This acknowledgement of own identity and values is important given that I possess the power, as a researcher, to write (for instance) according to my own suppositions. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 115) highlight this powerful position in stating that 'the power of researchers to interpret their selection of data through their own ideas and values, and in terms of their chosen epistemology, remains dominant'. It is impossible to remove this powerful position of any researcher. Further, in respect to the powerful position of the researcher during the interview stage, Kvale (1996, p. 126) argues that essentially the researcher has power in the process since he/she 'defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation, and through further questions steers the course of the interview'. A continuous step back and reflection becomes important. However, this is also an inherent limitation of qualitative research.

4.11.3 Reflexivity in the research process

Besides the politics of representation and positionality in this research, it was important that I considered the participants' narratives reflexively. Reflexivity enhances the validity of the research process. Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that this helps in identifying possible biases in stories which could have an effect on the overall data set. Thus, according to Tong et al. (2007, p. 351) when the researcher reveals his/her 'identity, credentials, occupation, gender, experience and training', reflexivity contributes to improving the research validity. Reflexivity is where the researcher tries to 'make explicit how intersubjective elements impact on data collection and analysis in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency and accountability of their re-

search' (Finlay, 2002, p. 211). In this respect, I had to step back and observe my participants objectively, acknowledging my own beliefs and biases early on in the research so that these would not affect the participants' responses.

In addition, using Kvale's (1996) guidelines, I had to ask my participants to confirm my understanding of aspects of their life stories. Thus, during the transcription process, I asked my participants whether they would like to comment on, and give their impressions and confirmation of, their interviews and interpretations thereof (Bryman, 2008; Creswell and Miller, 2000). In this respect, five full transcripts were emailed to head teachers who had expressed their desire to check the accuracy of their interviews. I asked them to add to, delete from or amend their interview transcripts if they wished, and direct me to the changes. The five head teachers replied to me without any corrections or amendments as the transcripts had fully reflected the contents of the interview and thus, felt fully satisfied with the depicted record. Thus, I have been open in giving the respective participants the details of the interviews, and analysis process. In this respect, I offered the participants an opportunity to comment or review the data snippets that I chose to represent the head teachers' stories. This was important in order that meanings ascribed to particular aspects of the life stories as reflected in the analysis are clarified by the interviewees. However, no comments came through but what is important with respect to research ethics and validity is that opportunity was granted.

These three aspects: politics in representation, my positionality in the research and reflexivity of participants' narrative, are therefore, key considerations in the research process.

4.12 Summary

This chapter aimed at presenting explanations and justifications of the research methodology of the current study. It has outlined the epistemological assumptions, feminist and social constructionist themes that informed the research. The choice of qualitative methodology was explained and supported with relevant literature. Next, the life history approach, its development, uses and limitations were discussed followed by its relevance to this study. To explore the life histories of the participants, the semi-structured interview was chosen as the data collection method, which was justified and grounded in the existing literature by discussing its strengths and weaknesses. In the next section, I moved on to participant recruitment, where the sampling method was explained, as well as the reasons for choosing it. Following this, the analysis of the raw data was introduced, explaining the thematic analysis in depth, the justification behind its choice and the steps of the analysis that led to the emergence of three main themes. Finally, ethical issues were presented and the relevant procedures that were followed to protect the participants' rights were explained in depth.

Chapter Five: Early Childhood Experiences and Schooling

5.1 Introduction to the Findings Chapters (Five, Six, and Seven)

The next three chapters focus on the analysis and discussion of three main themes that emerged from the life history interviews. These chapters tell the overall story of Saudi women head teachers in girls' secondary schools. Each chapter concerns a period of time of my participants' life, from their early childhood to the time that they were interviewed.

The analysis of data collected is presented in a chronological order of the life histories of my participants, from their childhood to their current professional positions. I have decided to combine the findings and discussion in three chapters based on three different stages of their lives as it allows me to review my findings in light of the existing literature. These chapters are:

- Early Childhood Experiences and Schooling
- University Life and Early Career Experiences
- Headship Experiences

The first chapter starts by looking at the participants' early childhood experiences and primary and secondary school life, while the next chapter discusses the lives of participants during the period between the completion of secondary school and graduation from university. The final chapter examines the experiences of my participants' life from the time that they were appointed as head teachers until the date of interview.

My rationale for presenting the findings in this structure was that it seemed most suitable when following a life history approach which enabled me to explore the stories of my participants at important stages of their lives. The large volume of data I collected from the interviews covered a wide range of experiences in the different stages of my participants' lives. Due to the complexity and diversity of their experiences resulting from the overlap between the impact of culture and gender, I selected stories from each participant that illustrated these influencers. In each section within the chapters, I explore the differences and similarities between the participants that highlight the varying effects of these influencers on their lives in order to present a complete picture of the social context.

I used thematic analysis to analyse my data and coding to identify the main themes and sub-themes which helped me to answer my research questions. It is crucial to note that these main themes and sub-themes are to be viewed as a whole, and to be understood within the context of the experiences of female head teachers.

5.2 Introduction to Chapter Five (Early Childhood Experiences and Schooling)

The purpose of this chapter is to examine two significant sub-themes in my participants' discussion of their early life experiences which enabled me to answer two of my research questions, namely, how did the early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female's journeys towards leadership? And in what way does the so-

cial construction of the participant's gender have an impact on their journeys and experiences of leadership? Two key sub-themes that emerged when comparing similarities and differences among the participants' experiences of early childhood are:

- Influences of family background and support, and
- Primary and secondary school experiences.

The main argument presented throughout this chapter is that culture and gender are key factors that influenced the participants' experiences. These are reflected in the categories of the sub-themes which include family support and encouragement, the career backgrounds of parents, social norms, and school environments. Figure 4 below shows the categories arising from the two sub-themes used to understand my participants' early childhood experiences and schooling.

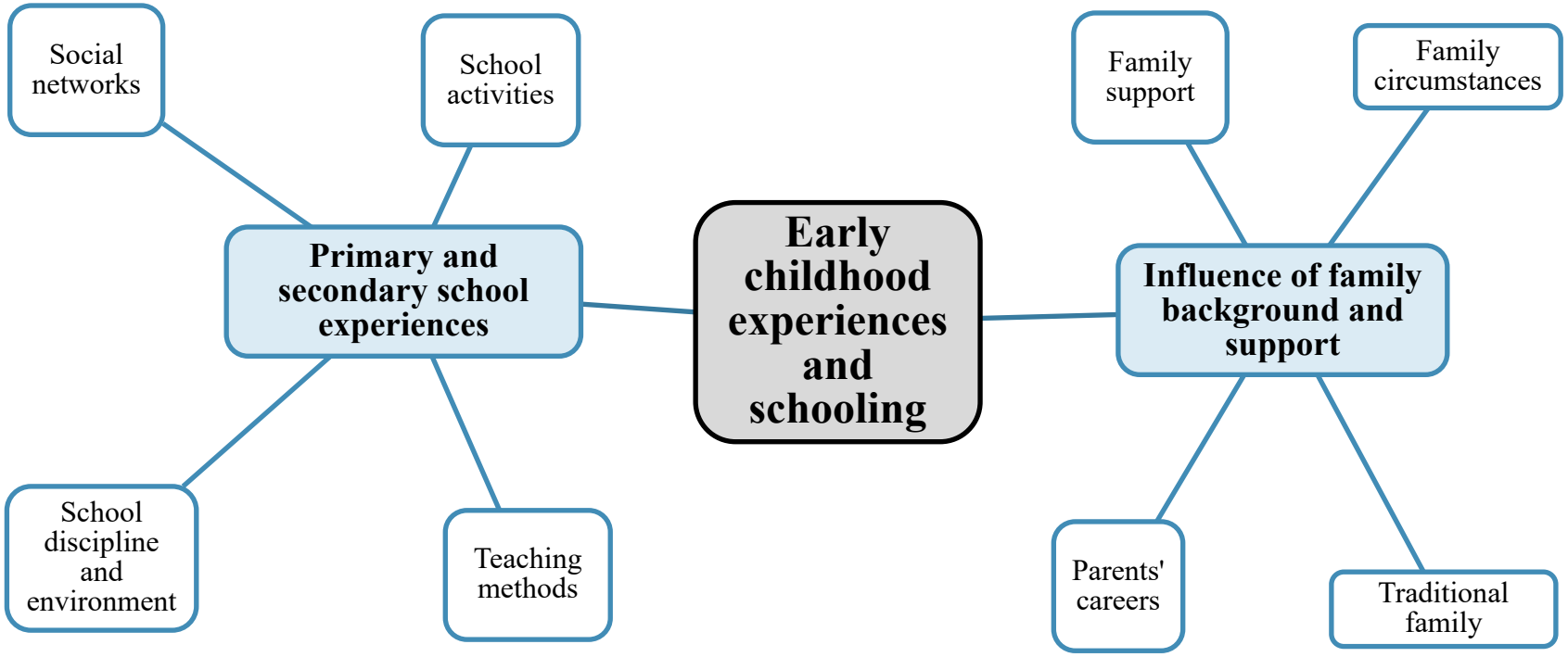

Figure 4: The main categories of response for the first emergent theme, ‘early childhood experiences and schooling’ including the two sub-themes and related categories

5.3 Influences of Family Background and Support

This section outlines the findings from the data in terms of the impact of family background, social and cultural expectations and encouragement on the participants, and how these helped to shape their professional experiences in their later lives. The key categories within this sub-theme are family circumstances, traditional family, family support and parents' educational careers. Table (5) gives the name of head teachers who are relevant to each category

Categories	Head teachers
Family Circumstances	Hanan, Sarah
Family Support	Ebtsam, Modi, Manal, Halima, Hasna
Parents' Career	Wedad, Reem
Traditional Family	Haifa, Laila, Sabah

Table 5: Categories and related Head teachers

Early experiences play a crucial role in an individual's life. Dependent on the circumstances of their upbringing, children develop the skills that they will use in their future lives. As such, the childhood experiences of the participants in this study were a significant influence on their role as head teachers, shaping their experiences in their professional lives, a finding reflected in other studies of women in leadership roles (Nivala and Hujala, 2002; Osgood, 2004). In particular, the development of leadership skills among female school principals in this study can be connected to their early childhood experiences. Although the participants grew up in a social context where men are seen as role models for leadership, their life histories reveal individual childhood experiences that clearly contributed to their development of leadership roles.

5.3.1 Influence of Family Circumstances

One of the main influences that impacted on the participants in early childhood was family circumstances. In particular, unpleasant family circumstances were cited as key influencers, shaping the lives of individuals such as Hanan and Sarah. Hanan, for example, expressed that she faced a typically challenging situation when she was growing up, which shaped the role she later took on in her life:

> I have had this desire to be in a position of leadership in administration, from an early age… This was perhaps due to the loss of my father when I only was fifteen years old, and I was the eldest daughter, so I shared the responsibility with my mother.

Hanan's remarks suggest that her inspiration to occupy a leadership role arose from a difficult situation early on in her life and the consequent, often overwhelming, responsibility being placed on her shoulders. Giving such responsibility to the eldest child is quite common in the context of the Saudi culture, and if the child happens to be a daughter, she has to help her mother with daily tasks such as housekeeping and taking care of the younger children (Meijer, 2010). These duties appear to have increased in Hanan's case as a result of losing her father. She gave several examples relating to her mother, who relied on her. Hanan summarised this situation by stating that 'she would consult me about many matters, and I would try my best to meet her expectations'. For Hanan, this sharing of ideas was important in making informed decisions at a later stage in her life. Hanan's difficult upbringing may have underpinned her confidence and maturity later at work when dealing with the challenges of her leadership role. Similarly, Moorosi (2010) argues that although some women principals in her study

experienced a critical situation during their childhood, they did not have regrets about it. Instead, the difficult situations during childhood positively influenced their character; for example, one of the participants in Moorosi's (2010) study perceived the divorce between her father and mother as empowering. The transformation of negative family circumstances into positive motivational factors for female leadership has been highlighted in other studies (Bennis and Thomas, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2003; Shamir and Eilam, 2005).

Sarah had a similar experience in her early childhood that shaped her personality in later life and prepared her for challenging circumstances. She explicitly stated this in her narrative, saying: 'I went through difficult situations that turned me into an independent person'. Losing her father impacted on the whole family, especially her mother, who had to take full responsibility and did her best to look after the family. Giving responsibilities to children from early childhood is found to increase self-confidence and independence, and developed skills needed when encountering challenges in later life among Pakistani educational female leaders (Malik, 2011).

Sarah's 'distress' increased when her uncle took over the role of 'caretaker' for the family, following local cultural traditions. She stated, 'my uncle suggested that my sister, who was three years older than me, in the final year of the secondary school and was at the top of her class, should get married to a man from a good family'. Her remarks suggest that Sarah strongly disapproved of her sister's marriage, particularly when she was almost at the end of her school studies. In Saudi culture, a father is often the primary authority in the family and has the final say on marriage decisions. How-

ever, in the absence of a father, his older brother usually takes over this task, particularly if there is no mature male in the family. Thus, it seems that, for Sarah's uncle, it was more important to find a suitable husband for her sister rather than allowing her to complete her education. Thus, consistent with Hamdan (2005), where significant efforts are made by families to encourage their girls to get married and meet social-cultural expectations, perceived as common-sense views. In this respect, social processes seem to have defined a marriageable age, 30 years in Saudi Arabia (Al Sari, 2003), which had implications on the expectations and experiences of my participants (Burr, 2015). There was consistent pressure to conform to these socio-cultural expectations, as Lorber (1994, p. 25) argues, 'the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations'.

Sarah's sister's case influenced her as she wanted to have more responsibility for making her own decisions, rather than having an authoritarian male making them for her. After her sister dropped out of school, Sarah's mother concentrated on encouraging Sarah to finish her school while her sister played a supportive role and urged her to do the same. This is consistent with previous research findings, wherein women leaders perceived their mothers as supportive, caring, and influential, providing a source of encouragement to their daughters (Madsen, 2007a; 2007b; 2010b).

Seeing women as lacking both agency and the primary skills needed to make decisions was unacceptable for Sarah. Recalling an incident from her childhood, she said, 'I avoided asking my uncle for money for my things. Following the example of my mother, who would make food items at home and sell them in her neighbourhood, I also started to tutor the kids living near my home to earn money'. Sarah explained that

she saw her mother and sister as the 'driving force in her life'. It is crucial to note the difference in how these women viewed the education and progress of women, especially when compared to the views of the men who felt that a woman's ultimate goal in life was marriage. This difference is clearly linked to the existing cultural norms in Saudi society.

Sharing family responsibilities during childhood is also known to result in early maturity, as evidenced by how the principal women in Moorosi's (2010) study constructed their leadership from their childhood experiences. Their narratives referred to having participated in securing the home financially as a result of a missing father or mother. The difficult situations they had grown up in strengthened their abilities to defend themselves and help their families (Moorosi, 2010).

According to Burr (2003, p. 3), 'each different construction also brings with it, or invites, a different kind of action from human beings'. Sarah constructed an understanding of responsibility and leadership from her experience of having a single parent, influenced by her sister's case, which was unique to her family. This helped her to make sense of what was happening around her. The decision to use education was influenced by the various historical events that surrounded Sarah's family and her local culture. This decision might also be seen as the best way of guaranteeing financial and social security for Sarah. Furthermore, Sarah's case shows the importance given by women to educating girls, even in difficult circumstances. As she stated, 'it is strength and insistence, nothing else'. This strength derives from the sociological context of the individual, where the social construction of identity is more significant than words and material objects in shaping a person's beliefs (Hacking, 1999).

5.3.2 Influence of Family Support and Encouragement

Not all participants in this study experienced a traditional, male-dominated or authoritarian family structure during their childhood. Some reported distinctly non-traditional, and ultimately more encouraging, styles of parenting which shaped their development towards leadership roles. Family support and encouragement played a significant role, acting as a major influence in childhood for participants in their future professional lives. Davids et al. (2016) reviewed literature regarding the associations between decision-making and parenting approach and concluded that a positive home environment contributes to the development of decision-making abilities, where parents offer opportunities to engage their children in decisions and promote autonomy. Modi, Hasna, Halima, Manal and Ebtsam all benefitted from family environments where they experienced less pressure to conform and could exercise personal agency within a relatively unconventional family structure.

Modi, for instance, received encouragement from her family members, and told me that her father played a vital role in her life and was a source of inspiration for her. Modi's father was educated much later in his life, largely due to the limited availability of formal education in Saudi Arabia during his childhood and adolescence. His early experiences gave him a clear understanding of the problems that arose from a lack of education, having worked on a farm as a child himself.

Modi narrated that her father always shared the challenges he had faced in his life with his children and encouraged her to 'go and try for yourself'. She shared that she is not afraid of seeking opportunities for herself in her current role as a head teacher, as will

be discussed in chapter seven. Modi's story can be linked to women in Cubillo and Brown's (2003) study, who all referred to the strong influence that their fathers had on their educational development. One of their nine participants, for example, said 'my father was very, very supportive. I still remember him saying: a woman's education is empowerment' (Cubillo and Brown, 2003 p. 285).

In addition to her father's role, Modi's narrative sheds further light on the environment surrounding her upbringing, 'I grew up in a stable environment. My mother and father understood each other very well and supported each other. They also dealt with us warmly and positively, offering us many opportunities to learn new tasks'. Modi's experience helps to shed light on the variations in gender perceptions in Saudi Arabia. Whereas Sarah experienced a positive influence only from the female members of her family (and specifically excluding her uncle), Modi's childhood reveals that both her mother and father had a significant impact in shaping her leadership abilities. In addition, their example suggests that in some of the families considered in this study, men and women played an equal role in the in the upbringing of their children. Modi's experiences provide insight into both changing cultural perceptions of the family unit and the growing socialization of women in KSA: unlike some women considered in this study, she could take an active role in her personal affairs with the full support of her parents. Likewise, Modi's case is reflected in other research, such as Malik's (2011) study, wherein female and male participants did not adhere to the traditional stereotype difficulties associated with them during early life, but rather felt personally empowered to pursue social, cultural and economic ambitions.

Modi explained the influence that her family had on her life, mentioning several times the support that she received from her family, to whom she attributed her success. Most explicitly, she claimed, 'my administrative success goes back to my family and the environment I was brought up in', an environment that included her siblings, who also supported her. From a social constructivist perspective, Modi's early childhood experiences included positive relationships, optimal communicative practice, and productive interaction among her family members, attributes which helped her to become a good manager and decision-maker, as evidenced in her later life (see chapter seven). Modi's description of her home life during childhood indicates that this was a positive environment, similar to those of Madsen's (2010) participants who grew up in stable families. Those among the participants who enjoyed a 'stable family' received more care, attention, and support from their parents and siblings in their childhood and this, in turn, encourages self-esteem and confidence.

Ebtsam's father's influence was significant in shaping her aspirations for a future leadership role. She claimed that:

> My father encouraged us to think as a leader, to express our opinions about matters and be persistent and persevere to achieve what we wanted. For example, when we face a problem in our daily life activities, my father used to give us full freedom to deal with the problem. He gave us independence and trusted us to act on our own first. Then, he would give us enough support when we needed it, usually by suggesting from his experiences, which offered effective solutions to our problems.

Ebtsam's upbringing stands in contrast to that of some of the participants discussed above, as she was given complete freedom to explore herself professionally and to take responsibility for her own decisions. The impact of this increased sense of agency and independence is reflected in her later decision to accept the role of head teacher, despite facing a strong reaction from her husband (see Chapter 7).

She attributes both her own success and that of her sisters, three of whom are head teachers and two deputy head teachers, to her father's upbringing. She stressed that he 'played huge role in getting me and the rest of my sisters to our position today'. A significant body of research shows that, during the crucial phase of early childhood, the fathers of women in educational leadership roles were found to be supportive and inspiring in relation to their daughters' education (Al-Lamky, 2007; Madsen, 2007a; 2007b; 2010; Malik, 2011; Moorosi, 2010).

Research indicates that the authoritarian pattern of parenting styles among Arab societies remains pervasive (Dwairy et al., 2006), while other parenting styles are exercised less. Manal's example shows that her parents did not adhere strictly to societal norms; rather, they adopted a parental style that seemed suitable for fostering her growth and development as a successful individual. As such, Manal's experience provides a key insight into how social and cultural changes within KSA operate with regards to a non-traditional upbringing and a less restrictive environment where authoritarian roles are limited. Thus, whilst Manal's parents' relatively unique parenting style does not reflect the norm, Manal's experiences reflect a change in these social norms that is increasingly reflected in the beliefs and attitudes of wider society. The childhood experience for Manal was a deviation from the conventional, traditional Saudi

family role structure, which enabled Manal and Saudi girls like her to change conceptions of the social roles of young women and construct new versions of female childhood (Burr, 2015).

The central position that male role models and patriarchal family structures play in many of the narratives included within this study should not preclude the importance of female family members to those narratives. Even within the most male-dominated or traditional family structures described by this study's participants, female family members and role models, particularly mothers, play a crucial part in fostering leadership skills at a young age. In her narrative, Ebtsam drew attention to her mother's influence by saying, 'mother was brilliant at organizing and distributing house tasks and responsibility according to age and abilities, even though she did not complete her education'. Ebtsam's experience can be likened to Hasna's, as both learned skills from their mothers which they later used in their own lives. Their narratives indicate that the leadership skills imparted by their mothers are perceived as occupying a crucial, albeit secondary, role. This offers a significant contrast with the background of female leaders in other cultures, who state mothers as their main influence on their career pathways, and that of Saudi Arabian female leaders. Chinese women, for example, in Madsen's study (2010), drew attention to numerous shared occasions with their mothers that determined their leadership attributes.

It could be inferred from the research that while Hasna's mother taught her daughter domestic affairs and socially appropriate behaviour, her father was interested in her academic achievement. She said that despite his heavy work schedule as an army employee, he would still keep a regular check on her studies by helping her with her

homework. In addition, Hasna was encouraged by her father to be like her grandmother 'who was known for her wisdom and good judgment of things'. It is therefore significant, in this case, that her grandmother was from another country, where women were educated at an early age and enjoyed an upbringing quite different from women in Saudi Arabia. This was a role for Hasna where early socialization was an important factor that underpinned her personal traits; her childhood upbringing helped her to develop an early sense of independence, self-confidence and assertiveness (Al-Lamky, 2007). Hasna herself aspired and worked towards achievement as she felt that 'this increased my confidence', a trend reflected in her later teaching career (see Chapter 6). Hasna's perception of her own identity seems to have been underpinned by the continuous positive interaction between her and her extended family members. These experiences of close, mutually beneficial relationships clearly contributed to her developing a sense of responsibility from a very early age, and whose impact contributed to her decisions-making skills in her later role as a head teacher (see Chapter 7).

Hasna's early childhood experiences highlight the impact family members have on the lives of some women in Saudi Arabia. She said, 'when I was young, I lived in a house where my father, who was a soldier, made us follow strict rules'. Her strict upbringing included inculcating discipline and punctuality, and 'obeying orders and directions for all tasks' given to her. Hasna admitted to being unhappy growing up in such a restrictive environment when she said 'I used to complain all the time and I was not happy with it. I mean, it was not appropriate for me when I was a child and young girl'; on the other hand, she also attributed her success to her upbringing when she said: 'I cannot deny that I benefited from that atmosphere when I became a head teacher'. Some women such as Hasna felt that although a father figure was authoritative, she was still

able to learn constructively from him. Hasna's case is very similar to most participants in Moorosi's (2010) study, where their fathers' roles were visible while the mothers were silenced and subordinate, 'in many of these stories, mothers were not seen as playing a significantly active leadership role in home, and, in fact, in some of these stories mothers were quite invisible' (p. 216). Male authority figures, such as fathers, are not confronted by mothers or other family members; in a context where male authority is rarely questioned, the opportunities for mothers to occupy leadership roles are limited commensurately (Moorosi, 2010).

Researchers argue that a child's birth order among his or her siblings has a lasting influence on their later life outcomes (Rohrer, Egloff and Schmukle, 2015), and parents often tend to see their firstborn as the most capable one in the family in terms of discharging responsibilities (Pillemer and Suitor, 2006). The narratives of both Hanan and Hasna indicate that this finding is supported in the experiences of the participants of this study. For example, Hasna said: 'being the eldest in my family meant that a lot of responsibility would be laid on my shoulders, I needed to be a role model for my siblings. My parents were very proud of me as a role model for them and followed my footsteps'. She also indicated that her mother also taught her 'patience, tolerance, good manners, independence and not seeking help from others, and to focus on my abilities and have pride in where I stand'. Again, this finding supports the idea that the birth order of a child has a critical influence on developing various skills in his/her life during upbringing (Pillemer and Suitor, 2006; Rohrer, Egloff and Schmukle, 2015).

Hanan's position in her family might have given her more opportunities to collaborate and interact with her mother during her childhood. This was accompanied with the

crucial circumstances she suffered early in her life, where her mother gave her responsibilities and shared the performance of many daily tasks with her. Hanan said: 'being in a difficult situation made me dream of a better future and I wanted to change my life'. This supports the idea that children learn from their parents in the first few years of their lives, and these initial experiences influence their future characteristics, including their ability to make decisions (Rohrer, Egloff and Schmukle, 2015).

5.3.3 Influence of Parental Educational Background and Occupation

Parental educational background and occupation also featured in this study as having a clear impact on the leadership qualities instilled in the participants' during their childhood. This is evident from some of the participants' accounts of their childhood: their family career background, in particular where either both or one of the parents were in the field of education, had a significant impact on future life choices. This was true in the case of Wedad and Reem. Wedad gave a particularly clear and detailed picture of her experiences:

> My father was the Director of Education Administration in my city. Whatever I have accomplished thus far is mainly because of his support and belief in me. Through him, I gained the necessary knowledge which enabled me to understand and implement rules and regulations. I learned how to distribute tasks to my staff members by discovering their individual talents.

Wedad's experience gives valuable insight into the role men played in some participants' lives, particularly with respect to their own future careers. Her account reveals

that she felt she owed much of her success to her father. His complete support also shows that some men in this rigidly gendered society give their daughters the autonomy and equal opportunity to develop their full academic potential, in contrast to some of the other participants who were not given as much support and independence. Wedad stated that, ‘he told us never to misuse his position (referring to her siblings) at school as he strongly believed in this himself'. The respect she saw her father gain as a result of his work encouraged Wedad to follow his example at work, treating her father as her role model. This finding is in line with the results of research conducted by Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann (2009); they investigated the role of parental educational level in the status of their children's future in terms of education and occupation. The researchers found that 'the effects of parental education were entirely indirect: higher levels of parental education led to higher levels of optimistic educational aspirations or educational attainment in adolescence, and subsequently to higher educational attainment or more prestigious occupational status in adulthood' (Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann, 2009, p.10).

The influence that parental educational background plays in contemporary Saudi Arabian families is evident in the case of Reem. She believed that her father, who had a solid academic background, inspired her leadership skills. Speaking of her early childhood experiences, she noted that her father's job had a significant impact on her: ‘My father used to be a primary school head teacher; I adapted his manner in dealing with students and staff in a fun and light way’. She said that she was fortunate to have received so much support from him, stating that she was continually having conversations with her father, who took on a crucial advisory role, using his experience as a leader to provide guidance and advice.

This opportunity was not available for Reem's older sisters as their father was working abroad when they were young. Despite growing up in the same household, they developed different attitudes and behaviour towards their education and careers. Their situation was slightly different from Reem's, as her mother, who brought them up on her own in the absence of her father, adapted a more traditional attitude to their upbringing. She focused more on teaching them household tasks and duties in the expectation that they would fulfil more traditional roles in their later lives, which stands in sharp contrast to the educational influence that the presence of her father had on Reem. However, as discussed in the next chapter, despite having full opportunity to pursue her academic ambitions, she encountered substantial challenges as a head teacher in the absence of family support following her father's death (see also Chapter 7).

5.3.4 Influence of Traditional Family Backgrounds

In contrast to the participants discussed so far, other participants in this study experienced a far more restrictive authoritarian parental upbringing, including participants Laila, Sabah and Haifa. Laila, for example, came from a very traditional family where children had no chance to express themselves freely or for their voices to be heard. She reported that her early childhood experiences did not develop her leadership skills and personality, which manifested itself as a serious challenge when she was first offered the role of head teacher (see Chapter 7). When asked about the role she played at home in engaging with her family members which might reflect her abilities as a leader, Laila responded, 'we were all obedient to my mother and father and we did not have any opportunity to make any decisions at home'. She attributed this to the style of parenting that her parents had practiced. She argued that her parents had a traditional

view of nurturing her and her seven siblings. Under the influence of this upbringing, her sisters became housewives and she married at an early age, an experience that suggests her family adhered to the norms of Saudi society. Her case also highlights that this lack of support from her family impacted on her subsequent adoption of a leadership role. In this case, it was inconceivable from an early age that girls could aspire to higher education and leadership because of the gender construct (Jonsen et al., 2010; Roberson and Kulik, 2007). In her narrative, Laila was unable to recount any incidents from her later career which explicitly connected her childhood to her continued undergraduate study during marriage (see Chapter 6), or her work as a head teacher. Having grown up within this traditional, hierarchical family environment, women have little opportunity to exercise agency within decision-making or to initiate change (Galambos and Hughes, 2000).

Sabah, like Laila, was raised in a traditional family where both of her parents were uneducated. She reported that, 'when I was living with my parents, although my siblings and I had a mutual relationship filled with respect, my father and brothers were the ones to call the shots'. This was reflected in her choice of studies at university (see Chapter 6) and the conflicting demands of dual responsibilities she experienced in her later life (see Chapter 7). These challenges, stemming from a lack of agency in early life, can be understood from the perspective of social constructionism, which theorises that all people are born into an existing culture that places restrictions not only on their actions but on the conceptual frameworks they use to determine those actions (Burr, 2015). Sabah's comment highlights the gendered nature of Saudi society, which favours boys over girls in terms of both social and political agency. As was the case with Sarah, whose uncle made decisions at home with long-term impacts on the lives of

female family members, Sabah's family also followed the cultural norm of allowing the male figures in the household to make important decisions. Laila's and Sabah's narratives are not in congruence with the other participants in this study such as Ebtsam, Manal, and Modi, whose fathers promoted an autonomy at home that enabled the women to be less dependent on men. Their narratives also conflict with research findings pertaining to Omani women leaders, who often insisted on receiving family support, desiring to break away from the traditional Arab family norms of female subordination (Al-Lamky, 2007).

The childhood description of Laila and Sabah's memories is one where the female members can be mistreated both physically and emotionally with a disproportionate burden in terms of housework and domestic labour. In their upbringing, this focus on domestic labour took precedence over education, attitudes and behaviours that were reinforced by the mother in the family group (Meijer, 2010). These attitudes towards women's roles in the family are further projected by the subordination of female family members to the authority of male family members. Girls are under the authority of their male relatives, who are automatically considered suitable guardians regardless of age difference or maturity. Older women are either subject to their husbands or brothers, or in the case of a widow, their guardian could be their own son (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Although some women suffer abuse from their relatives, and, in most cases, are socially compelled to suffer in silence, the narratives of Laila and Sabah indicate that, rather than being dissuaded by these experiences, some individuals are motivated to overcome these obstacles to achieve their aspirations (Alsweel, 2009).

Haifa also did not recall many incidents from her early experiences. Her case in particular indicates that not all head teachers had the types of support in their early childhood which would later shape their professional lives. Her early childhood experiences were also different as she had to depend solely on herself. She expressed that her early childhood did not reflect positively on her future career or her ability to make decisions (see Chapter 7). Speaking about the attitudes towards education within her household, she said, 'none of my family members have finished their education except me. My siblings are all involved in basic menial jobs, as they don't think going to school or graduating from university is important in getting to higher positions'. Haifa's parents were strong adherents to the traditional parenting style, as they did not offer her opportunities to make decisions, but rather their actions reinforced the importance of filial obedience: 'I used to listen carefully to my family and follow their instructions; they used to express their satisfaction with that'. Although Haifa grew up in an uneducated environment, she was nonetheless able to progress to the position of head teacher, but via a longer and more protracted career path. The situation in which Haifa found herself may support Alsweel (2009) claims regarding Saudi women: 'it is true that Saudi women may seem silent and obedient, but the reality is, they are very aware of their situation and are working hard on changing it' (p. 12).

As the above analysis shows, the participants received support from their family members to varying degrees depending on different factors including: family background, parents' educational level, participants' birth order, having a single parent, and, most importantly, the extent of adherence to the social norms. Wedad, Hasnaa, Reem, Manal and Halima's support came from their fathers who held important positions, but in the case of Modi and Ebtasaam, it came from the open-mindedness and positive attitude

of both of her parents. Hanan and Sarah, on the other hand, gained the support of their families when they faced difficult circumstances. In the case of Laila, Haifa and Sabah, there was no significant family support, a circumstance which had a protracted impact on their lives. As the participants concluded, those who had received family support felt it contributed a lot to their personalities and careers later on in life and vice versa. Further, although the women in this study did not discuss their childhood personalities at any length, they all seemed to have been 'obedient' in a similar way to the majority of women who were university presidents in Madsen's (2007b) research. Her participants reported other childhood personality traits in evidence among participants in the current research, for example, obeying and respecting their parents and older people (Madsen, 2007a). This cross-cultural similarity hints at a wider underlying set of personality traits associated with women's educational leadership and suggests the crucial role of early life experiences in shaping women's leadership journeys.

Having discussed the influence of family backgrounds and support on the leadership journeys, the next section discusses the head teachers' experiences in primary and secondary schools.

5.4 Experiences in Primary and Secondary Education

In this section, I present the findings from the data in terms of the impact of early primary and secondary school experiences on their leadership abilities. The early school experiences of my participants included school activities, methods and styles of teaching, school discipline and environment, and the social networks they formed during this period.

Offering leadership opportunities to girls in the primary and secondary school may influence their personal qualities in ways that help them in their future careers (Cubillo and Brown, 2003). More specifically, school experiences occupy a critical position in their ability to influence the development of leadership skills within students (Lavery and Hine, 2013; McNae, 2011). Previous research found that from around the age of 13 girls start to take critical decisions that impact upon their future career paths; they can, to some extent, develop a sense of their own identity that encompasses an understanding of their future roles and careers (Madsen, 2007a). Although the participants of this study did not recall much of their school life where all of them went to public schools, their accounts suggest crucial differences in the influence of these experiences. While Hanan, Manal and Halima perceived school life as having a vital role in shaping their personalities, their ability to lead, and make their own decisions, the majority believed that their leadership abilities had not been influenced by that time.

The early school experiences of Hanan were inspired by her social network at school. She reported that this period of her life provided her with the essential support she needed when she said, 'the girls I befriended at school were very close to me and we became a source of support for each other in study matters'. She reported that her friends came from a similar background, particularly in terms of the challenges they faced, which included family instability and the extra burdens and responsibilities encountered as a result. Despite these family challenges, Hanan and her friends, did not drop out of school. It is possible that the similarity of challenge experienced by Hanan and her friends brought them closer and enabled them to communicate more openly about their future. She further mentioned that the support she offered her friends seemed to assist her to develop her social skills, as she reported:

> Difficult circumstances make us think deeply about life and help in shaping the destiny of the individual. This is what I have observed. The three of us [referring to her friends] who went through difficult times, now hold good leading positions, and the fourth one, who enjoyed a well settled life, has not been so successful from the day she graduated until now.

It appears that the difficulties that Hanan experienced at this point in her life, particularly the loss of her father, reflected positively on her future and prepared her to take on responsibility in her own life. Some of her success is clearly attributable to the close relationships and the circumstances she faced during her early childhood. This finding reflects those of Boghossian (2001), which shows that social networks formed in school can play a significant role in fostering a sense of responsibility and developing a view of life of an individual.

The case of Manal, who came from a supportive family, is somewhat unique in that her experiences at school was related to one of her family members, an aunt who was a head teacher of a primary school. In Saudi culture, aunts are expected to play significant roles in a young woman's development: as Manal confirmed, her aunt acted as her guide and support. Manal had a comfortable environment which encouraged her to participate in school events and activities. She shared her experience by saying, 'my aunt used to ask me to take part in the in-school events, including presenting at school assemblies. Actually, without her encouragement I would not have been able to develop myself'. She reported that the effect of this encouragement lasted through her university education and beyond, even impacting on her career as teacher and head

teacher. The encouragement to participate in extra-curricular activities may be particularly significant: there is a substantial body of evidence showing that students who take part in extracurricular activities develop good behaviour, improve their self-esteem and social skills, leading to their success in the future (Kort-Butler and Hagewen, 2011; Massoni, 2011). Ekechukwu et al. (2014) stress that future leadership responsibilities can be prepared for through engaging students in extracurricular activities during school life.

Halima, who was constantly encouraged by her father as her role model, also played an active role at school, where she was responsible for carrying out different duties from Year 3 onwards, for example as the class monitor, helping to tidy up the classroom and presenting at school events and celebrations. She took the initiative in these cases, seeking out these responsibilities of her own accord: as she said, 'my teachers never showed me how to improve or guided me towards the tasks which would have helped me'. Instead, her school leaders merely appreciated her efforts, passively rather than actively reinforcing her development. Halima's comments highlight the disappointment she felt because her school only provided an environment where she could show her abilities but did not actually teach her or help her to improve on the skills that she felt she learned from her family. The treatment can be perceived as reinforcing the taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions (Lorber, 1994) regarding the future prospects of girls in a gendered society. Thus, the lack of support and encouragement from the teachers could be perceived as a typical gendered attitude and behaviour that reinforces the status quo of conceived gender prospects (Getz and Roy, 2013).

Whereas participants Hanan, Halima and Manal spoke about how school influenced their personalities positively, the rest of them did not have similar feelings. For instance, Hasnaa attended a military school, one of the many schools run by the military in various cities of Saudi Arabia, and which are open to the children of Saudi armed forces personnel. These schools offer activities and education in addition to the general curriculum set by the Ministry of Education but are also required to follow a strict and disciplined routine. This was the case at Hasna's school. Speaking of her school, Hasna said: 'all of us were surrounded by military figures who were like our fathers, so we had to respect the officials and follow rules issued by the school without grumbling'.

However, she felt that since the school focused more on academic achievement and student discipline, such an environment did not develop her skills, especially her sense of management, agency and leadership. Tubbs and Garner (2008) argue that students can be affected positively or negatively by the school climate: the impact of a positive climate could help develop social behaviour, increase students' attainment in standardised testing, and promote communication skills (Thapa et al, 2013). However, the converse is also true. For Hasna, the primary and secondary school environment had a limited impact on her personality, as she said: 'my school times did not help me to discover my leadership skills and abilities or allow me to explore my full potential as much as my own family did'. Hasna's case highlights the variation in the participants' experiences at school; for her, the lack of support at school due to its strict, rigid system of discipline and education made her experience less productive compared to those of Manal and Hanan.

Modi indicated that she had studied in a setting which followed a teacher-centred approach as ‘most of the schools at the time were based on the traditional method with no focus on developing skills or discovering the talents of students’. She felt that school did not have any effect on her later in life, saying that, ‘If you saw me now as a leader, you wouldn’t believe I was the same quiet student in school. I mean, no one was there to explain or encourage me to participate’. Modi’s sense of isolation at school seems to indicate that she would have benefited from more student involvement, which may have provided her with the opportunity to discover her abilities. Reem also spoke about a similar experience. Being a shy student, she felt that, ‘I was at school but kind of isolated. I did not participate much in activities’. She said that she was a good student whose only aim was achieving high grades, academic achievement being the sole focus at her school. She agreed with Modi's perception that school played no significant role in her life. Both Reem and Modi’s experiences highlight the need for student support at girls’ schools in Saudi Arabia, which in their opinions was vital for their future development as leaders.

Thapa et al.’s (2013) review of research on the impact of school climate shows strong links between student outcomes and school climate, asserting that ‘studies around the world also indicate that the quality of the school climate contributes to academic outcomes as well as the personal development and well-being of pupils’ (p. 4). Unfortunately, the participants in this study appear to have largely suffered the adverse effects of this causal link: they did not speak about participatory learning and education, or sharing decisions, and their teachers were highly traditional in classroom management and instruction. Felner et al. (2001) suggest that teachers do not only enhance their

students' academic performance, but also develop students' competencies and characteristics in their later lives. When my participants were students, the school climate was not considered when assessing the school quality. Students' achievement was the overriding indicator when evaluating education outcomes (Akhter, 2011). For example, Sarah agreed with both Modi and Reem, and shared her experience at school stating, 'there's no direct influence my school education had on my current role as a leader. Leadership cannot be taught, it is a talent'.

Ebtasam also experienced an educational setting similar to Modi, Reem and Sarah. She spoke about an incident during her ninth year when she refused to go to school for about ten days. It was quite common for girls to take such breaks at the time. She expressed that 'school was boring, and I did not find it creative enough to help me in my life'. Haifa also did not perceive the role of school in developing her abilities and she could not recall school having a strong influence on her. She did not pay much attention to school as, in her opinion, students who excel are the ones whose parents make tremendous effort outside the school rather than the effort of the teachers and curriculum which is being taught at our schools. Therefore, she did not attribute her success as a leader to her early childhood education and her comment reinforces those of Hasna, whose experiences of family support were more important in shaping her personality and influencing her future career. These findings stand in sharp contradiction to the narratives of women from non-KSA educational backgrounds in other research (e.g. Madsen, 2007a; 2007b; 2010b), who stressed that they enjoyed their school experiences and developed their skills and abilities in a school environment. This contrast could be rooted in the schooling system prevalent in KSA at that time,

where the concentration was mainly, and sometimes solely, on academic achievement (Wiseman et al., 2008).

Despite the influence of extra-curricular activities on students' educational development (Cubillo and Brown 2003; Madsen, 2007a; 2010b), limited opportunities were available for the participants in this study. This is unlike the quantity and the pattern of activities mentioned in western schools, for example, the women leaders in Madsen (2007a) recounted practicing more than fourteen in- and outdoor activities. Involvement in these activities ‘improved their written and oral communication skills’ and taught them to work under the direction of others’ (Madsen, 2007a, p14). Similarly, in a parallel Arabian culture, Madsen (2010b) found unique activities practiced by Emirati women leaders during their school life ‘volleyball, soccer, horseback riding, swimming, field trips, and music lessons’ (p. 91).

Conner and Strobel (2007) estimated that in the USA ‘more than a half million high school students participate each year in some form of youth leadership programming’ (p. 276), a type of opportunity never made available to the women in this study. The analysis of the interviews of head teachers show that most of them did not feel the school environment had a direct impact on the development of their leadership roles later in life. However, for some participants, such as Halima, Manal and Hanan, school seemed to give them a chance to excel academically and taught them discipline. These aspects of their experiences may have motivated them to pursue an educational leadership position. Women head teachers in this study had unique experiences in their primary and secondary schools; they lacked the activities that might have contributed to improving their leadership skills, unlike other women worldwide (Boghossian,

2001; Cubillo and Brown 2003; Madsen, 2007a; 2007b; 2010b; Moorosi, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). These differences in school experiences can be referred to the application of the unique educational system that existed in Saudi schools when the participants were students. Recently, training programs to develop leadership among school students have been organised; these programs offer opportunities to develop students' skills and self-confidence (Lavery and Hine, 2013).

5.5 Summary

This chapter explored how early childhood experiences, including relationships and interactions with family members and primary and secondary school life, contributed to the construction of the reality faced by female head teachers in a Saudi social and cultural context, and how these experiences influenced their ability to make decisions. The majority of female head teachers interviewed were influenced positively by their families' structure, function, and interpersonal interaction and this in turn helped them to attain educational leadership positions. While some participants tended to perceive their early school climate as one that sustained and developed this learning process, others experienced a complete lack of support in their school life for anything not directly connected with academic achievement. Several crucial issues emerged from the analysis, including the key impacts of birth order, having a single parent, parenting styles, and gender roles. The influence of these factors on women's leadership skills were discussed in accordance with the participants' social context and their individual circumstances.

Chapter Six: University Life and Early Career Experiences

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the lives of participants during the period between the completion of secondary school and graduation from university. For some of them, this period marked a double transition as, besides transferring from school to university in their education, they moved from their parents' home to their husband's home.

The chapter aims to explore three key sub-themes which help to shed light on the impact of this period on their personalities, particularly with regards to their leadership abilities both at home and during their studies. The three sub-themes are categorised as:

- Access to university education
- University experiences, activities and events
- Early career experiences (as teachers)

By exploring these three sub-themes, the chapter addresses the following research question: in what way does the social construction of the participant's gender impact on their journeys and experiences of leadership? As in the previous chapter, culture and gender emerged as the main factors influencing their experiences. Some aspects of their experiences were shared by all the participants at this stage of their lives, broadly falling under the three sub-themes outlined above. Figure 5 below shows the categories used to understand my participants' university life and early career experiences that are linked to the identified three sub-themes. However, the data showed that

these aspects of their experience were complex and interconnected to a greater extent than the experiences discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, due to this complexity and diversity of experience during this period, I have selected extracts from the narratives of all participants that best demonstrate the key influences on their journeys. These aspects include: the influence of their family members; marriage; and their expectations and conceptualisations of their study and future life. These influencers are addressed in each case, to further an understanding of the development of participants' leadership styles in their later headships and careers.

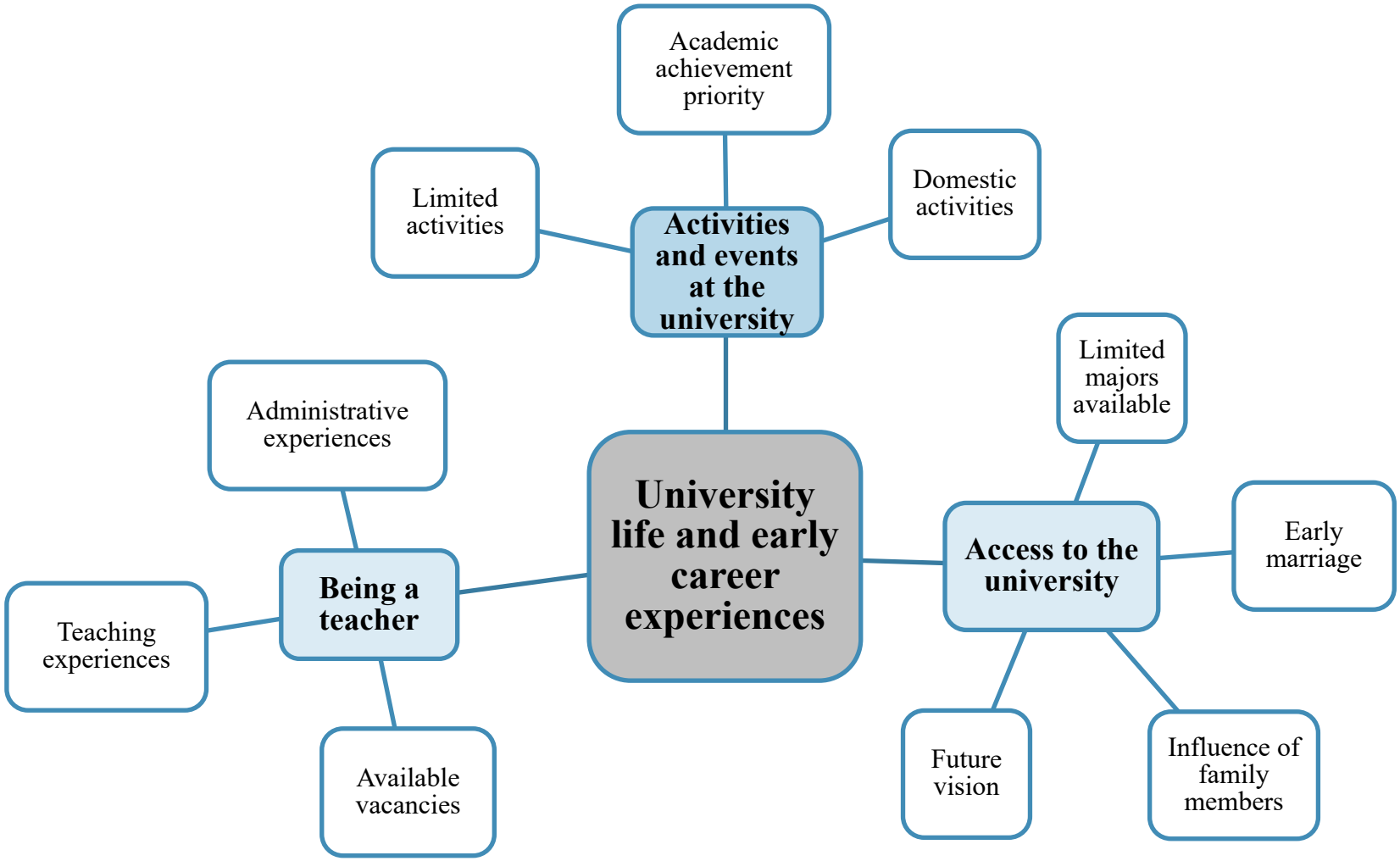

Figure 5: The main categories of response for the second emergent theme, 'University Life and Early Career Experiences' including the three sub-themes and related categories

6.2 Access to University Education

The data collected in this study from the shared experiences of female students following higher education reflects limitations and social restrictions in the continuation of their studies and the choice of professions. This might have resulted from a number of factors, including society's perceptions of women's education and work, the influence of family members, cases of marriage and students' visions of their own futures. As such, an outline of the wider context of the participants' education will clarify the influence of these interconnected factors.

Until 2002, educating female students in KSA fell under the jurisdiction of the Religious Guidance Department, who were responsible for delivering women's education in line with prevailing official pedagogical philosophies relating to women. This philosophy was oriented towards preparing girls for work that suited their traditional conceptions of their roles, which, in practice, meant the work of being wives, mothers, or teachers (Alamro, 2012; Doumato, 2003; Hamdan, 2005; Porter and Umbach, 2006). This notion of women's education was rooted in the religious and social norms that prevailed at the time, which reinforced gender inequality in education opportunities (Alwedinani, 2016).

The narratives of Laila, Haifa and Sabah, who came from traditional families, reflect the social restrictions placed upon them in making important decisions in their life. Laila paints a vivid picture of her situation upon completion of secondary school with regards to both her personal life and choice of subjects:

> I was brought up in a traditional environment where marriage is seen as the top most priority for girls. We were four daughters (three sisters and myself); all married right after high school. I was engaged in my final year of secondary school. You know, secondary school was the last educational level before the university... I had chosen to study literature rather than science subjects because I had not dreamed of continuing my studies.

Laila's narration confirms the idea that 'there is a common belief amongst Saudis that home is the natural place for women. That is, the primary role of women is nurturing and raising their children' (Alwedinani, 2016, p. 20). These common beliefs, as argued in section 3.7, largely stem from tribal traditions that involve the male's domination and patriarchal protection that confine the roles of women to inside the house and serving the family (Al-Qaradwi, 1998; El-Saadawi, 1982). Further, the decision to choose literature instead of science subjects, in the case of Laila, also reflects the persistent of feminine career choice which has been attributed to the internalization of gendered norms and gender discourses (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016; Smulyan, 2004). The difficulty inherent in challenging this conception of women's roles is especially prominent later in her narrative, when she recounts her struggle to balance the dual responsibilities of her personal commitments as a mother and wife and her professional commitments as a head teacher (see Chapter 7).

Laila's statements reveal the relative lack of importance given in her culture to women's efforts to pursue professional careers. Rather, it was presumed that a woman's role was to eventually become a wife and mother. She added:

> Frankly, when I successfully passed my secondary education, I had no academic ambition. From my cultural perspective, there were limited options available for me; getting married was the prime one and because I was engaged (as I just mentioned), I was not enthusiastic to search for a college to enrol in. I got married and moved to another city with my husband.

This may be in line with the findings of Bar's (2016) research, wherein she found that although women's skills and abilities were being acknowledged in Saudi society, some women still hold the belief that 'women should stay at home and men should go to work' (p. 110). Laila's words indicate that she initially accepted the role assigned to her by society and followed this norm by living a life according to the wishes of her husband. Further confirmation of this attitude can be seen in her reaction to being offered her headship position (see Chapter 7).

However, Laila also perceived her early marriage in a positive light, attributing positive change in her personality to it. Having been raised in a more conservative environment, she appeared to feel a sense of freedom in her husband's home as he let her manage domestic affairs. She said:

> Being away from home [referring to her parents' home where she lived before marriage] helped in strengthening the relationship between my husband and I and helped in preparing us better for the future which freed us from any other social responsibility. My marriage made me feel independent, clear and positive.

Eventually Laila was able to continue her education after marriage and she felt fortunate to be able to do so, saying: ‘I think I'm lucky, as I'm the only one from my sisters who managed to complete my studies’. However, when she decided to enrol in a university, she faced substantial limitations on the academic choices available to her. As she stated:

> I applied to a college and got an offer to study a bachelor’s degree. At that time, there were very limited options. I registered at the Arabic Department which I thought wasn’t a difficult major and did not require much work to succeed, especially since I was married and had household tasks and I didn’t want my studies to affect my home life.

Such limitations in choice of degree subject closely follow Alwedinani’s (2016) findings in which she stated that ‘Saudi Arabian women are forced to study certain subjects that are described as feminine by Saudi society. Most Saudi female students (nearly 93%) graduate with a degree in education or the humanities’ (p. 140). Thus, as Hoskins and Smedley (2016) note, the socially constructed positioning of gender makes careers that foreground feminine attributes, such as education, an obvious choice for women. Laila’s account captures the cultural understandings regarding the education of girls that prevailed in Saudi Arabia during the decades when she was growing up. Although women were not denied the right to an education, such education was still perceived as unnecessary. The main priority for women was their home life and, consequently, gaining higher education might prevent them from fulfilling their main roles as mothers and wives. Thus, through their social interactions, the women have constructed their understanding (Burr, 2015; Schwandt, 2000) of their priorities in life.

Doumato (2003, p. 255) concluded that, in KSA, 'women are weaker than men because through law and custom they are not full adults'. Arguably, this perception resulted in several limitations being placed on women's agency to make decisions in their educational life. This is reflected in Laila's case, wherein she had neither control over the choice of majors nor interest in more intensive courses of study that risked conflicting with her household duties.

Haifa described a similar experience to Laila in terms of the impact of KSA cultural perspectives on women's education. She said:

> After I graduated from secondary school, I applied to university, although my family did not encourage me, and I was the first one [in her family] continuing her higher education. The common belief among our community and family members was that higher education for girls wasn't necessary; it was viewed as an extra issue while the important thing was getting married. From their point of view, if a girl could read and write, this would be fair enough for her. Women were not required to have a job but should concentrate on their main responsibilities, which were taking care of husbands and kids.

Although there is a shift in social attitudes towards women, Alsuwaida (2016, p. 111) stated that 'more recently Saudi Arabian women have been labelled as homemakers, irrespective of their educational backgrounds, career interests, and qualifications'. Haifa's account sheds light on the gendered society in Saudi Arabia which prescribed the differences in the roles of men and women. Unlike Laila, Haifa was not married

before she joined university, but she felt the societal pressure throughout her studies. As she admitted in her narrative:

> I was happy because I enrolled in the university, but I still remember that during my studies at university, I felt anxious that someone would ask for my hand in marriage. If this happened, my studies would be interrupted. I always heard my parents and relatives around me talking about this issue, this was their main concern. But thank God, no one came with a proposal.

It is probable that Haifa's parents were acting on a common belief in Saudi culture, namely that the father is responsible for the girl in perpetuity unless she gets married, whereon her husband then takes over this responsibility (Al-Sheikhly, 2012). Cultural perspectives on marriage continued to influence Haifa's life even after her graduation, through her parents' insistence that she should conform to social customs. What is perceived as normal or acceptable by society is effectively a product of human definition and interpretation shaped by cultural and historical context (Schwandt, 2000, Subramaniam, 2014). In the case of Haifa, marriage was an expectation. Haifa said that:

> My parents perceived being single as something not normal, although I was still 26 years old. Three years later, someone approached my father wanting to marry me. To be honest, I wasn't completely satisfied with him: I felt that he was not educated enough. They told me 'you are old enough now; if you don't accept, no one will come again. The optimal choice for a girl in this life is marriage'. And they kept pressuring me, so I accepted.

In both the cases of Laila and Haifa, the decisions they made in this aspect of their lives, particularly with regards to marriage, appear to have been made under pressure from their families and regardless of their personal feelings. Their choices were made for them, in line with cultural norms and traditions. As such, the study data supports the findings from previous research that selecting a topic in higher education is highly influenced by gender expectations (Lorz et al; 2011; Porter and Umbach, 2006; Tsagala and Kordaki, 2006). Similarly, in a KSA context, Baki (2004, p. 3) suggests that 'the education system treats the sexes differently due to their different societal expectations. Males and females are directed into different courses by a differential tracking system. Males are taught about male activities; and females, about their nurturing roles as mothers and housewives'.

Another example of how cultural restrictions affected the women's life journeys was reflected in their choice of studies, as depicted in Sabah and Halima's accounts. Although they came from different backgrounds, cultural restrictions played their role, ensuring that their subject of study was chosen by their families. In the case of Sabah, despite her strong academic track record throughout secondary school, she could not enrol in the major of her choice, primarily due to pressure from her parents. She said:

> There was a medical college in the area where I lived at that time. I got 97% academic average, so I was able to meet the college requirements. I loved the medical profession; I felt that this profession was the best on earth. You know, treating human beings is the best service you can ever deliver to people.

Gender inequality in terms of subject choice is not only reported in KSA, but also observed worldwide. Vincent-Lancrin (2008) found that women in the countries that ratified the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) convention were proportionately underrepresented in engineering, mathematics and sciences, while they were overrepresented in education, health and humanities.

Traditional families, as in Sabah's case, appear to act in accordance with the idea that applying principles of gender equality in women's education might give rise to wider social instability. Al-Sheikhly (2012) referred to the traditionally prevalent perception among conservative scholars that 'if women left the house for education, they would most likely obtain a career within their educational field and neglect their natural duties' (p. 5). Advancing in education, in this case, can be perceived as a distortion of the male and female gender roles (Acker, 1992; Alvesson and Billing, 2009), which had to be resisted by the dominant social groups (Stone, 2007). This is important given that men occupy privileged positions in cultural, educational, academic and other aspects in Saudi Arabia (Abalkhail, 2017; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). Nonetheless, Sabah's narrative reveals her excitement and passion for studying the subject she wanted, rather than being forced to choose something she had no interest in. As she continued:

> Unfortunately, my parents thought that medicine was not suitable for girls. They told me 'medicine is a difficult major, especially for girls, and takes a long time to complete. This will affect your normal life'. So, I studied biology which would enable me to become a teacher.

This extract shows some gendered constructs in the perceived abilities of male and female in society. As highlighted in section 3.5.3, in any society, there exists more or less profound ideas that certain types of education, career choices, work and certain positions are connected with a certain gender (Binns, 2010; Mavin and Grandy, 2012). Further, Sabah's narrative provides evidence that support the findings that women in employment in KSA are not equally distributed across the labour force, but rather that approximately 85% work in the educational field (Alwedinani, 2016). This figure is common in many places around the world (Arar, 2018, Khattab and Ibrahim 2006). Nonetheless, Sabah's account suggests that she felt real distress and unhappiness when unable to realize her ambition of becoming a doctor. With regard to the selection of subjects in university, she faced challenges comparable with those faced by Laila and Haifa.

In contrast, some Saudi women participating in recent research were encouraged by their parents to study for entry into the medical profession (Alwedinani, 2016). Sabah shed further light on the issue of gender inequality in this regard from her personal experience. She felt that she was treated unfairly in comparison with her brother:

> By the way, my older brother, when he applied to Medical College, they didn't refuse him at all. They were very happy and proud of his choice, and they encouraged him. They believed that boys had no direct home commitments, which girls did, such as taking care of kids. Anyway, this is our community and its tradition.

The choice of majors at university highlights the gender-based social stratification in Saudi Arabia, further confirming the evidence relating to cultural perspectives on the

roles of men and women in KSA society. This finding supports Alsuwaida's (2016) statement that 'academic concentrations are not gender equal as women cannot choose majors such as engineering or law' (p. 112). Further, social class or levels of economic privilege are a strong influence in choosing a field of study and employment (Thorpe, 2016), which might elucidate how class and gender intersect to enable opportunities at particular moments in time.

Although early marriage is considered to be a serious problem in KSA as it impedes women's access to higher education (AlMunajjed, 2009), this was not the case for Halima as she did not face any issues with her parents or husband in continuing her study at the university while she got married. They believed that she could continue in her education while she was married. She was able to enter university, but her story shows some difficulty in choosing a major; her decision was not independent but influenced by Saudi cultural perspectives on roles deemed suitable for women (see Binns, 2010; Mavin and Grandy, 2012; Getz and Roy, 2013). Her preference with respect to discipline was ignored by her husband, who felt that some careers were culturally inappropriate for women. Commenting on her challenging experiences she said:

> More than thirty years ago, early marriage was prevalent; when I was in the final year of high school, a man came to ask for my hand in marriage. Although my family and I were determined that I complete my studies, I agreed to the marriage willingly, without any pressure from family. My fiancé was in total agreement that I should complete my studies and offered to help.

It is crucial to note that although Halima was not forced to marry, and whilst her parents and her future husband did not have an issue with her completing her studies, they nonetheless interfered in her choice of subject of study. As she stated:

> After graduation I got married. I aspired to be a social worker as I used to volunteer for my community. However, my husband refused, saying that this area of work required a lot of physical effort. I would have to work in hospitals or prisons, and this type of job was not suitable for a woman or for our social status. I accepted his point of view and applied to another department.

The variation in the ambitions of the women discussed so far bears close scrutiny in this respect. Sabah and Halima shared similar ambitions and aspirations to develop professionally in challenging careers. This stands in direct contrast to Laila and Haifa, who did not express a strong interest in subjects not traditionally studied by women in higher education. However, in the case of all these four participants, they eventually conformed to social expectations, with varying degrees of discontent.

Other participants' accounts, including those of Ebtsam and Manal, reveal a number of minor but highly relevant differences in perspective on their university life, in which they received both encouragement and support from their family. For instance, Ebtsam's family did not adhere to the cultural norms they allowed her to study in another city before marriage, an arrangement that was uncommon at the time.

> My family, especially my dad kept inspiring me; he was open minded, he travelled a lot as he was businessman, and he encouraged girls' education. My father's view was that 'education is very important for girls and

> shouldn't be ignored'. This is what helped us (my sister and I) to reach these positions… At that time, very few universities were available in KSA, so my father persuaded me to travel to Riyadh for education.

She expressed her satisfaction with this decision, but the choice of subjects, as in the case of the other women was still a point of stratification for her gender as she said:

> I studied geography, although it wasn't my preferred subject and I didn't want to study it. But it was the only choice I was allowed and would enable me to become a teacher. As you might know, at that time, job opportunities for girls were limited. I think it was a good choice for me.

Ebtsam's case is similar to some women in Alwedinani's (2016) study, whose fathers did not interfere with their daughters' studies or force them to study subjects that did not fit with their personal ambitions or expectations. However, Ebtsam suggested that she was conscious of the relevance of her choice of major to her future professional aspirations, and this awareness affected the choice she made. Her account highlights the connection between the choice of majors for women and employment outcomes.

Although Ebtsam was dissatisfied with the major she was compelled to study, she voiced positive sentiments about her life at university, which she felt promoted her personal development and gave her a sense of responsibility, independence and identity. Ebtsam expressed her satisfaction when she recounted these pivotal experiences, saying:

> University life improved my maturity, I lived on campus in the university accommodation. This made me independent and self-reliant and affected me positively. I could manage my financial affairs and other issues. The

> girls I lived with came from different cities and I learned a lot from their experiences. I explored my abilities and dedicated most of my time to studies… the most important decision that I had taken was to reject marriage. I had decided not to get married until I completed university.

Ebtsam's account highlights the variation in the impact of decision-making on different individuals' personal lives. She could negotiate an educational system that, at the time, encouraged female students towards their presumed future roles as mothers and housewives (AlMunajjed, 2009). Not adhering to the social norms, as was the case with the other participants, allowed Ebtsam to develop as an individual.

Manal's story bears considerable similarity to Ebtsam's in terms of her family's perspectives on education for girls, as they also offered support. However, they could not ignore the limitations in the educational system. Her experience reinforced the significant role gender played in girls' education and career options. Manal explained why she became a teacher rather than a business manager. In this portion of her narrative, her tone expressed that she felt a sense of disappointment at not being able to pursue the profession of her choice:

> Since I was a child, my dream was to join my family business or manage a private company like my dad. When the time came to study at university, it wasn't possible to enter business school as it was restricted for girls. My older brother studied business and another one became a lawyer. Unfortunately, due to the limitations in our education system, these disciplines were not acceptable for girls.

Seemingly, the most important event in Hasna's life occurred while she was a student at university. As she explained:

> ‘Getting married was my own decision. When I was in the final year at university, my parents discussed marriage with me and told me, ‘it’s your own life and you have to choose what’s best for you’. A man approached me with a proposal and he seemed capable, which was not something to be rejected. Yes, I decided who I should marry. I chose my husband’.

In discussing this experience, Hasna believed herself fortunate to have the opportunity to make her own decision. It is crucial to note that Hasna’s family’s approach towards marriage was very different from that of the other participants. By giving her the choice of selecting a husband, they did not conform to the common practice at the time with respect to marriage. This supports the conclusion of Vincent-Lancrin (2008) in her discussion of the reason for gender inequalities in Europe, the United States, and Japan, wherein she stated ‘the higher the parents’ level of education, the more open minded they are to women in the workplace and the greater the chances of their sons and daughters of participating on an equal footing in higher education’ (p. 280). Further, this supports the social constructionist proposition that gendered practices are fluid, dynamic and changing (Lorber, 2010) with education (both of parents and participants) being an agent of change (Alvesson and Billing, 2009).

Another example of not adhering strictly to cultural norms can be seen in Reem’s case. Reem’s narrative is distinctive in that she disregarded others’ suggestions about her choice of major at university. Although limited majors were offered to girls, Reem made her selection based on her passion for the subject rather than availability. Her

ability to make this decision appears underpinned by her early year's experiences. As she said:

> I chose my major on my own when I completed secondary school. I rarely let others decide for me, especially in my personal affairs. You know, most people in our community didn't want to change our tradition and habits. It was frustrating living in this community. So, I studied English literature, I liked this topic as it enabled me to open my mind and discover a new culture.

Reem's sentiments reflect the discontent and dissatisfaction she felt towards the existing social limitations on the agency of young women. Her narrative also highlights that she felt confident in her own ability to make personal choices, despite her awareness of prevailing social attitudes to the contrary. Reem also strongly expressed her dissatisfaction with the prevalent beliefs regarding marriage being the main priority of a woman's life, saying:

> Probably the greatest decision I had taken at the time was postponing my engagement. I refused to get married because I learnt from my eldest sister's experience that it would be difficult to manage studies and marriage at the same time. I also saw my married colleagues at university struggling with motherhood, which negatively influenced their achievements.

Unlike some of the other participants, who were more passive and accepting of cultural norms, Reem resisted these norms, perceiving marriage as a barrier to studies and

work. However, speaking about her university experience, she did not feel that it developed her personality, as it did not play an active role in improving her ability to become a leader. She stated:

> My college wasn't appealing, so my interest was focused on my studies. I studied hard and achieved high marks in my courses. My leadership ability and decision-making skills did not develop in university.

Reem's disappointment in her university environment, and her perception of missing out on a potentially enriching university experience, suggests that higher education institutions for women did not offer well-rounded programs that prepared them for professional life. This lack of opportunities for women is clearly congruent with the stratification of gender mentioned earlier by some of the participants.

Sarah narrated a university experience similar to that of Reem's, which she also did not perceive as important in shaping her leadership skills. She said:

> I don't remember that I had a sense of leadership during my university life. I was working in the university library to help my mum. So, my focus was on my education and work.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Sarah's situation differed from that of other participants, having grown up in an atypical family environment. As her father had passed away during her childhood, extra responsibilities were placed on her shoulders relatively early in her life. Her mother concentrated on encouraging Sarah to finish her school, while her sister played a supportive role and urged her to do the same. Nonetheless, she was compelled to find a job to support her family financially, and thus her reason

for postponing marriage until after her university and early career can be attributed to the challenges posed by these circumstances. Research in this field has identified that the most common motive for women in Muslim communities in seeking higher education is altering their family's social class, primarily through studying in a field that enables them to easily find jobs (Alwedinani, 2016; Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Mellor, 2007).

These results show that, while the vast majority of the participants' families had no objections to younger female family members seeking higher education, some families did not give the participants freedom to choose the subjects. To some extent, Muslim Kenyan women experienced similar situations in terms of their parents' attitude towards completing higher education, with parents supporting their daughters' enrolment in university (Murenga et al., 2013).

In recent decades, although a greater number of female students than male students finished a university degree in KSA, a far broader choice of field of study was available for male students, including engineering, politics, law and aviation (Alwedinani, 2016; Hamdan, 2005). Regarding choice of studies, Vincent-Lancrin (2008, p. 86) reports that men and women differ significantly, with women 'far more likely than men to study subjects relating to education, teaching, health and the social sector'. Most of the participants reflected this trend and were well aware that their gender had played at least some part in determining their educational opportunities, career choices and employment outcomes. AlMunajjed (2009) stresses that 'women's degrees are concentrated in education and teaching, human sciences, natural sciences, and Islamic studies' (p. 16). This segregation by subject at university level is facilitated by gender

segregation in the educational system, where, in their separate universities, it is easy to restrict the subjects on offer for women to those thought to be suitable to women, and vice versa (AlMunajjed, 2009; Alwedinani, 2016). These aspects reflect a gendered society which assigns abilities and attributes to particular gender groups (Burr, 2015).

The education system in Saudi Arabia also reinforces the existing inequalities in employment opportunities for women. Baki (2004), discussing the KSA higher education system, stated that:

> The Saudi education system limits women's access to labour markets and participation in the global economy. The education system does so in two ways. The first way is by restricting women's entry into certain fields of study. Women are excluded from studying engineering, journalism, pharmacy, and architecture (p. 7).

An analysis of the data shows the social and cultural views regarding the gender appropriateness of certain types of subjects and employment, which seemed to be prevalent in participants' accounts. As suggested by the participants, one of the few respectable professions open to women seeking a career appeared to be teaching, whereas men enjoyed a far wider range of career choices, including business and medicine. Teaching appears more aligned with feminine attributes (e.g. caring, shaping and nurturing children), which makes it a gendered career choice (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016; Smulyan, 2004; Vincent-Lancrin, 2008).

6.3 University Experiences: Events and Activities

This section discusses the similarities that emerged from participants' accounts of their experiences of the main events and activities at university, and which they viewed as significant in forming and sustaining their leadership abilities. The participants' narratives are thus congruent with the prevailing evidence that higher education can significantly improve women's skills and knowledge, affording numerous opportunities to underpin women's personal development and ultimately sustaining the community (Bar, 2016; Kandpal et al., 2012).

During their university lives, each of which lasted for approximately four years, the participants reported a broad range of experiences that they felt impacted upon their future development. Although most of them perceived this period as relatively passive with regards to developments in their personalities, some participants highlighted opportunities that impacted on their leadership skills. The common perception among the participants was that limited university activities were offered for females in comparison with their male counterparts (Kinzie et al., 2007). In men's colleges, the extracurricular activities included sports competitions, festivals, exhibitions and picnics, conducted both on campus and outside the university grounds. By contrast, extracurricular activities for women mostly focused on religious activities and home economics, with events held exclusively on college premises.

It has been suggested that students' engagement in extracurricular activities increases opportunities to develop a sense of leadership (Eccles et al., 2003; Komives and Jonson, 2009). Wedad had a rich experience in university life and was readily able to

identify how this helped develop her abilities to be a leader and decision maker. This included both interaction with other students and participation in university activities and events. She commented:

> I feel that my personality was shaped when I was at university. I felt mature and began to express my opinion freely. My instructors used to select me to take part in several events. I volunteered in many social activities which brought a positive effect to my self-confidence, it enriched my leadership ability.

She further added that 'communication with students who had come from different cities taught me how to deal with different women, which I think is very important for effective educational leadership'.

Wedad's experience shows that, even within the limitations of activities offered to women at her university, she sought out opportunities for herself that enabled her to emerge as a leader. As a result of her own effort and willingness to engage with her peers, she was able to attain a positive outlook on her professional life which some of the other participants discussed earlier were not able to achieve.

A substantial body of evidence exists regarding the involvement of female students in sports activities and its influence on personal characteristics (Buckworth and Nigg, 2004; Eccles et al., 2003; Keating et al, 2005). Unfortunately, this type of activity was not available for participants during their higher education. The findings from this research are consistent with other existing studies, which show that female students enrolled in a segregated university take part in activities that target developing educational skills (Kinzie et al., 2007). Manal, for example, recounted being unable to recall

much about her university life except that participating in most activities, such as voluntary events, could be relevant to the development of some of her skills.

Manal, Wedad and Hanan also recounted other positive impacts of their university life. Hanan felt that her university environment was positive as it fostered social relationships in the form of lasting friendships. She seemed to enjoy her time at university and shared her experience with her old friends who had enrolled with her in the same department. Hanan said:

> We were very close to each other and we encouraged each other, we discussed our issues together, we planned our future together. Because we come from similar backgrounds, we understand each other perfectly. I talked many times on my colleagues' behalf, I used to deliver their voices to the university panel.

Although Alexander (2011) insisted that students have to learn leadership skills in their colleges, the rest of the participants perceived their university life simply as a transitional period that would enable them to obtain jobs. They had no interest in the limited activities held in their colleges.

At the time of the participants' university studies, a bachelor's degree was recognized as the sole requirement for young women wishing to enter the teaching profession. Consequently, the main goal for this group of participants was to simply obtain their degree and thus become eligible for entry into the profession. This lack of engagement may have contributed to the majority of participants' perceptions of their university experiences as overly passive, as with the accounts of Haifa, Halima, Laila, Sarah, and

Reem. Haifa suggested that university life did not particularly influence her in any way, stating:

> Frankly, I can't remember anything amazing happening. I don't think it was a truly memorable experience. I remember that I just wanted to complete my studies. I was mainly interested in getting my certificate as I just wanted to work.

Haifa's account is not consistent with Alexander's (2011) conception of university life, who states that 'the general mission of higher education historically has been to educate students to be future leaders' (p. 202). Other head teachers felt that they did not have time to devote to university life. For instance, Halima said:

> Indeed, it was a silent and inactive period for me, I was not positive or leading in any way, whereas in the past I had participated in many activities and taken the initiative. But after marriage I was busy with my responsibilities, especially as I was young and had a university course to complete. The worries of married life diminish creativity.

Halima's account suggests that some participants found it difficult to balance life at university with their lives at home. As such, their lack of interest in playing an active role in university events could be attributed to the dual roles of homemaker and student they were compelled to adopt, and their consequent difficulties in balancing the two.

Hasna shared a similar experience to Halima and Haifa, expressing the belief that university life had no influence on her future leadership skills. Commenting that 'I can

say that at the time there was no activities run by the university that could enrich students' personalities', she highlighted the absence of extracurricular opportunities for female students at university in her account. Her comments further strengthen the implication that some participants would have liked to participate in such events if they were made available to them. It has been reported that, in a single sex educational setting, the atmosphere of female students' campus is limited compared to male students, and that extracurricular activities tend to be more readily available to male students (Kinzie et al, 2007). The gender ideologies in the educational settings largely reflect the societal understanding of gender (Burr, 2015) which privileges the treatment of male better than female in the case of Saudi Arabia.

In addition to the above-mentioned activities and occasions during participants' university life a few head teachers also mentioned the impact of their university majors, focusing on the acquisition of new skills and knowledge which fostered their later development. For example, Modi stated:

> I really enjoyed studying Art; through it, I learnt to be more creative and to view every situation from different perspectives just as each shape I saw had multiple dimensions. Studying this subject affected my personality as it taught me how to deal with each person in a different way.

Reem and Hasna, who had studied English at university, said they drew similar inspiration from their major. Reem commented, 'English helped me to discover new cultures and opened broad prospects for me'. Similar views were expressed by Hasna, who added 'I loved [the] English language; it's like a gate to knowledge'. While higher education provision for women in KSA started with arts and education in 1970s

(Hamdan, 2005), research has argued that students who enrolled in social science, humanities, and art majors are usually described as extroverted (Balsamo et al., 2012). This is in line with the accounts of Modi, Reem and Hasna, who perceived themselves as enthusiastic, talkative, sociable, friendly and outgoing.

The study data suggests that university life was viewed and understood very differently by the participants. Some felt that it merely facilitated their formal academic progress, through passing modules and achieving certificates at the end of their studies, instead of offering opportunities to discover themselves as individuals and develop community engagement. On the other hand, some participants felt that the time they spent at university encouraged them to engage in activities which to a certain extent helped shape them as individuals.

Analysis of the data suggests that Saudi women's participation in extracurricular activities is influenced by their culture and gender (Bakken, 2013). Social roles can help in understanding the limitations and types of the participants' engagement in the available university activities. How each participant sought to take part in university life was strongly influenced by their conception of how this participation could help them to fulfil the roles expected of them by their society. The study supports the finding from previous research that Saudi women students' expectations of their perceived social role do not encourage them to develop general leadership skills (Alexander et al., 2014; Hamdan et al., 2016). A similar situation was also found to be prevalent among Qatari college students (Rehal, 2015).

6.4 Becoming a Teacher and Early Career Experiences

As the primary role of women in Saudi culture was that of a nurturing mother and housewife, participants had a limited number of career paths open to them, as suggested by the data collected. They were confronted with numerous restrictions, including the cultural perception that women were less capable than men in general, and more specifically their lack of ability in controlling financial affairs, traditionally perceived to be a male responsibility (Baki, 2004; Doumato, 2003; Porter and Umbach, 2006). These restrictions on the availability of employment opportunities influenced their decisions regarding their career choices (AlMunajjed, 2009); their main career option was teaching in segregated women's schools, mixed-gender educational environments being prohibited by Saudi law (Hamdan, 2005; Rutledge et al, 2011).

The career choices available to women in KSA continue to be highly influenced by higher education institutions' system and structure (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). This can be linked to the above discussion of the study data; wherein most head teachers were well aware of their occupational future when they enrolled in universities.

As evidenced by the majority of participants' accounts, during the period in which they graduated from university there was an increasing awareness of the importance of women's education in KSA. This resulted in plentiful employment opportunities for participants, as many schools were already established and had vacancies for additional teaching staff. As Al-Hamid and Jamjoom (2009) stated, 'there was an urgent need for female graduates in education to work in the schools, whose number were increasing day in day out as a result of the spread of women's education' (p. 761).

However, the process of teacher recruitment and appointment was undertaken by the MoE, following a centralised system. The recruitment of teachers did not include recruitment tests, interviews or professional courses beyond a bachelor's degree. As men could not teach in all-female schools in Saudi Arabia, the participants were easily able to avail themselves of this opportunity to enter the field of education. None of them reported difficulties in obtaining teaching jobs; rather, they spoke about the process as uncomplicated. Modi explained the reason for this:

> The system was like this, 'just send your application to the MoE' [Ministry of Education]. The process of acceptance was based on the field's needs and the MoE was in need of many female teachers, so consequently the vast majority of women who had applied were accepted. The MoE just wanted to fill job vacancies.

Taking into account that the women in this study were influenced by the socio-cultural factors in their career choice, they did not face challenges in obtaining employment. This finding seems to contradict the perspectives of the Saudi women who participated in the research of Al-Asfour et al. (2017), who encountered difficulties both in finding work and pursuing their careers. These difficulties may depend on the type of career being sought and the age differences between participants in Al-Asfour et al.'s (2017) study and in the current research. When my participants applied to their careers, there were many vacancies that needed to be occupied by women, but this may no longer be the case. As highlighted in Chapter 2, these vacancies were as a result of the rapid expansion of the gender-segregated Saudi school system.

A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the specific challenges influencing the decisions of participants in this study with respect to their future careers had only a limited effect on their performance in those careers. The vast majority of participants reported experiencing moments of profound fulfilment within their teaching and headship roles, expressing their satisfaction with their roles as teachers and speaking about the support they offered their students and colleagues in a positive way. They used descriptive terms such as ‘caring’, ‘assertive’, ‘successful’, ‘concerned', ‘active’, ‘taking initiative’, collaborative, ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘being loved’. As argued by Alvesson and Billing (2009, p. 24), ‘most work is not gender neutral but is attributed some form of masculinity or femininity, either vaguely or in the shape of more specific ideas about what the work involves’. In this case, the attributes highlighted by the female head teachers are highly feminine which supports the extant literature of gender influence on career choices (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016; Smulyan, 2004; Vincent-Lancrin, 2008).

Hasna considered herself a proficient teacher and able to make a difference in her school, despite being recruited in the field of education without much preparation or pre-service training. Similarly, Reem’s story reflected how she felt about her performance:

> When I started my teaching journey strongly, I was keen to improve my performance. I got involved in many school activities. I can tell you that I love changing things. I’m not like other teachers who are not willing to change. These aspects helped me to become a successful teacher. Our school principal noticed my dedication and innovation, so she used to consider my opinion regarding the school’s issues.

Taking into account the participants' belief in, and acceptance of, their inevitable destinies as teachers, their performance as teachers seemed to be influenced by the social construction of their gender roles as nurturing, mothering, and caring (Alamro, 2012; McCrae; 2003; Smith, 2007). Embracing these notions as part of their philosophy for both teaching and pastoral support for students has contributed to their perceptions of being successful teachers. Reem's account shows that teachers like herself exploited the opportunity given to them to the fullest by being active and creating a lasting impression on their senior colleagues. Her story also highlights that women who faced challenges and restrictions in this highly gendered society were still able to perform well within their spheres. This is comparable to the life histories of female teachers in Smith's (2007) study. Her results showed that while female teachers encountered gendered social challenges in terms of their wider career choices, they demonstrated high development in their teaching skills. Their internalization of cultural and gender stereotypes seemed to reinforce their careers.

Participants' overall levels of teaching experience in this study varied, with the lengths of their teaching careers ranging between four to sixteen years (see section 7.2 attaining the position of head teacher). During this time some of them reported that besides teaching they also had opportunities to perform administrative roles, which contributed to their leadership skills. They felt much stronger as a result, stating that they were satisfied with their attainment. This sense of satisfaction may derive from perceptions of their students' achievement and development (Smith, 2007). Reem, the youngest participant in this study, spoke about her experience at length:

> The supervision department selected me to teach high school students, which is very difficult [as] they had special requirements. But they kept

> telling me that 'you can teach them appropriately and meet their needs, you can deal with them properly as you understand them'. The principal used to assign me to do extra work besides teaching such as counselling students and leading extracurricular activities. I fulfilled these extra duties.

Although the head teachers' narratives suggest that they had not seriously considered principal-ship before they were offered posts as head teachers, their teaching careers all show evidence of growth toward management and administration. For example, Hasna, who grew up obeying the strict rules of her military father, stated:

> I highly respected schools' administration and executed all their decisions. I also followed their instructions. I took part in many administrative tasks in the school. Honestly, I was dedicated to my work and always tried to do my work perfectly. I realized that I had an obligation to my school administration to improve our performance and standards.

Similarly, Ebtsam engaged in a range of administrative activities. She had worked as deputy head teacher for four years besides being a teacher, and she felt that her skills and abilities improved progressively as a result. Ebtsam also worked with several school principals while she was a teacher, and this gave her the opportunity to understand different styles of leadership and to compare their strengths and weaknesses. These cumulative experiences helped Ebtsam in her later role as a head teacher and underpinned her leadership skills. She said:

> I learnt a lot from my previous head teachers. Some of them did not like reforming and developing education in our school, and they didn't have the communication skills to deal with teachers, whereas others were strong

> and brilliant leaders. They used to inspire me in my work and encouraged me to step forward.

Modi described her experience in teaching in a similar way:

> I enjoyed working as a teacher for ten years. We worked as an amazing and outstanding team. I delivered training courses to other teachers and also helped my students by creating and giving them positive encouragement.

These were not the only challenges head teachers had to face during their early careers. Other participants' experiences present a different scenario, and their narratives reveal a more complex set of motives driving them to take up leadership positions. For example, as the data shows in Sabah's narrative, the participants' experiences as teachers strongly motivated their decision to apply for headship positions. Crucial to this motivation was their desire to act as role models to both students and teachers by inspiring them and improving their performance. Furthermore, as Sarah suggested, they might have hoped to prove themselves by doing better than the appointed head teachers who were sometimes incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities. Sarah described how her decision to become a head teacher was brought about by her teaching experiences:

> A head teacher was transferred to our school, she was quite subjective and unfair. Honestly, most principals were unqualified to manage their schools. They were incompetent and traditionally leading their schools. They had a culture of consecrating the boss. In our school, we had

many outstanding teachers, but she showed a strong dislike towards them. We also did not like her system of management.

Although headship positions included substantial responsibilities, it was perceived by a few participants as being an easier role than that of a classroom teacher. This provided an additional motivation in applying for headship positions. As some of the participants suggested, the physical workload involved in delivering lessons to all students in the class and meeting their needs placed a lot of pressure on them. This perception of the headship role was reinforced by Haifa when she reported health issues as a motive underpinning her seeking out a principal position. She said, 'I brought a medical report referring that I had a back pain and I could not stand in the classroom. So, I sought a headship role'. In general, cultural and gendered roles continued to influence my participants during their university life and early career periods. Their career choices, in particular, were strongly influenced by these factors. Although my participants' professions were socio-culturally constructed, this facilitated their employment and personal development.

6.5 Summary

At the time that the participants finished their secondary school, higher education was undergoing substantial growth and improvement in Saudi Arabia. The available types of educational programmes in the universities were determined by the policies in place covering girls' education in KSA. Female students' opportunities to select majors in their universities were highly influenced by cultural perspectives of women's roles. The prevailing attitudes in the participants' communities were that the optimal position

for women was at home, and that their main duties and responsibilities were taking care of their family members and fulfilling domestic tasks. This perception restricted the participants' agency in choosing topics of study and strictly limited the range of higher education institutions that were open to them.

Their awareness of these restrictions led participants to try to study subjects that would enable them to adopt future careers that accorded with this cultural construction of gender roles. For all participants, this led to them selecting majors that might lead to work in the education sector, where being a teacher was seen as the most culturally acceptable occupation for them.

During their university lives, the participants experienced a range of situations that played an active role in shaping their personality, such as improving their decision-making and leadership skills. However, the participants also felt that unequal opportunities were offered to them in their universities in terms of extracurricular events and activities. Due to the strict rules regarding the segregation of education, almost all such events and activities for female students were held on college grounds, limiting the opportunities such events created.

However, one key side effect of the segregation of the educational system, when coupled with the growth in women's education during the early careers of the participants, was the emergence of substantial employment opportunities for all participants. With many job vacancies available in girls' schools, the participants found it easy to find employment in the teaching profession. For the women in this study, social and cultural pressures combined with temporally-specific conditions in the educational labour

market to make the teaching profession appear an almost inevitable career path. Their expressions of happiness and satisfaction can be read as their way of adapting and conforming to this combination of pressures. However, there is clear evidence in the data showing that their careers as teachers were not without difficulties or challenges, and to which participants tended to respond in individualized ways that reflect their specific experiences and backgrounds.

Some of the participants had the opportunity to perform administrative roles whilst in teaching roles, which contributed to their developing leadership skills, whereas others moved into the principal position directly without first gaining experience in such duties. Although many women in this research did not have specialist teaching qualifications, working as both teachers and administrators provided some indirect training that they would rely on as future leaders. Participants universally viewed their varied and challenging experiences during their first few years in their chosen professions as crucial preparation for leadership roles in education.

Chapter Seven: Headship Experiences

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the experiences of my participants' lives from the time that they were appointed as head teachers up to the date of interview. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to answer the overarching research questions: What are the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they face in their journeys towards leadership in respective schools? And in what way does the social construction of the participant's gender have an impact on their journeys and experiences of leadership? The findings from the data analysis are grouped into four sub-themes, these being:

- Attainment of the position of head teacher
- Head teachers' perspectives on their roles and performance
- Perceived challenges in headship experiences
- Perceived influencers affecting leadership performance and skills

The chapter begins with a discussion of the process of obtaining the headship position, its requirements and conditions. The next section examines the participants' satisfaction with their roles in their respective schools. This is followed by discussion of their perceptions of the power and authority available to them and their views regarding the MoE's regulations and instructions regarding head teachers. It also explores how these situations have influenced their leadership styles and performances.

The participants have experienced a number of challenges associated with being in a headship position that have overlapped with their social and cultural norms. These

challenges include navigating the centralised education system, barriers to communication, female educational supervision, lack of headship training, fear of accountability, financial responsibility, and the pressures of dual responsibilities. This chapter also discusses how the female head teachers dealt with these challenges. Finally, the chapter identifies numerous factors that facilitate their leadership performances, including their ongoing experience, social relationships and networks, *wasta* (the culturally-specific, nepotistic exploitation of these networks, see section 7.5.2 below), and family support. Figure 6 shows the categories used to understand my participants' headship experiences that are linked to the four sub-themes identified in the main theme (headship experiences).

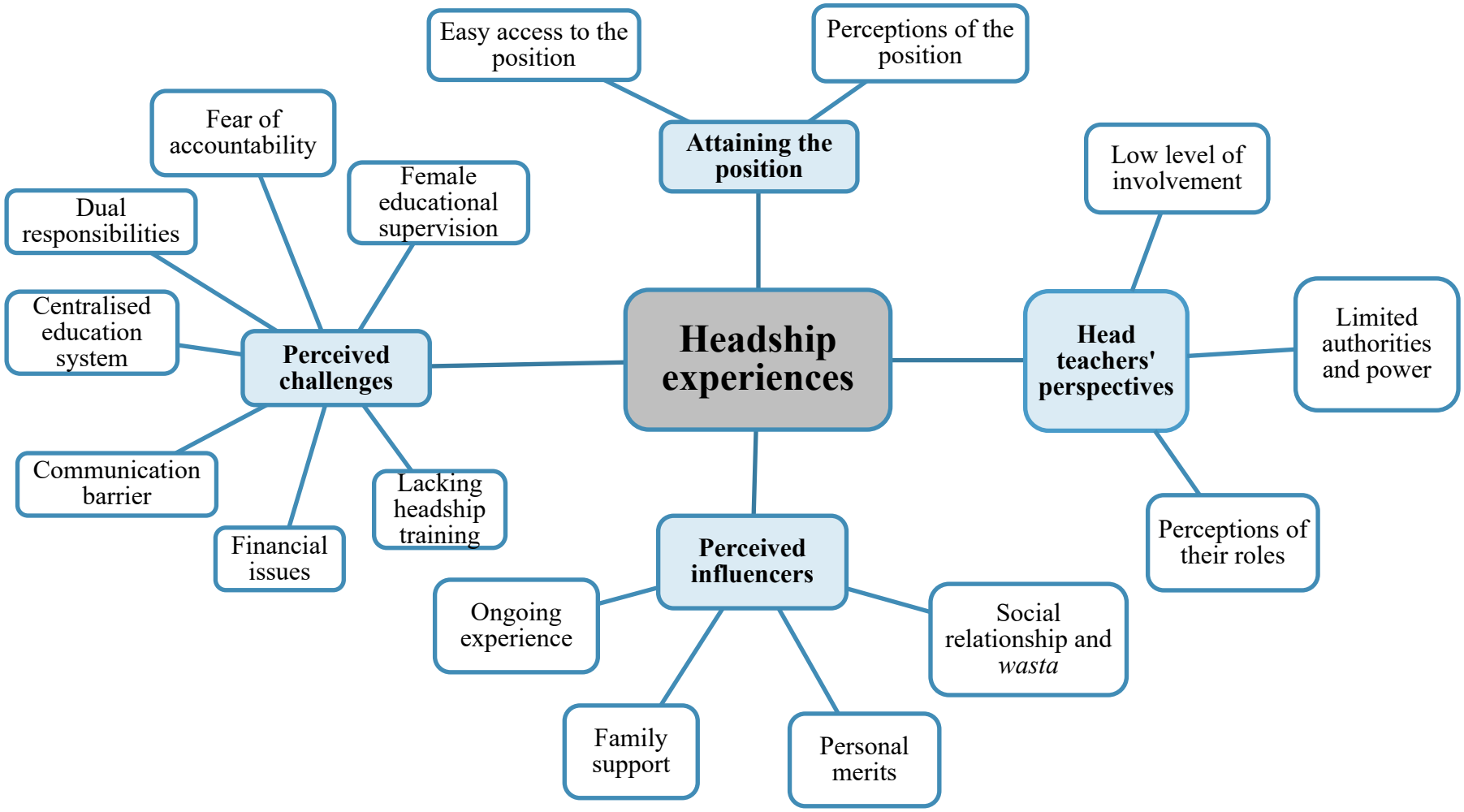

Figure 6: The main categories of response for the third emergent theme, 'headship experiences' including the four sub-themes and related categories

7.2 Attaining the Position of Head Teacher

This section illustrates how the participants secured their appointment as head teachers and the conditions surrounding it. Most educational systems have clear and systematic processes for selecting a head teacher. Head teacher candidates may need to meet certain requirements and prerequisites including holding qualifications, a specific period of experience, tests and interviews. Data collected from the participants in this study shows that the position of a school principal in a KSA educational context did not come with these requirements. Whilst some participants had gained prior experience in an assistant principal position, which might normally be considered as a prerequisite for becoming a head teacher, others moved directly into headship without any such employment experience. Thus, my participants are not in agreement with the women head teachers in Eckman's (2004) study who talked about their appointment process as either a challenge or an issue. Further, as discussed in section 6.4, recruitment and appointment in the education sector is not complicated because of the wide shortages of female teachers and head teachers, partly because of the gendered separation of girls' and boys' schooling (Al-Hamid and Jamjoom, 2009).

My participants' journey to a headship position was, nonetheless, similar to the female head teachers in Hansen's (2014) study, where principals became principals of high school in Utah State through serendipity, wherein they found themselves suddenly developing new identities as head teachers. Similarly, none of the women head teachers in rural primary schools in Kenya anticipated that they would be head teachers at the start of their teaching careers (Wangui, 2012). To some extent, this can also be said of participants in this study.

A common statement reported by participants was that ‘there was a need for the headship position to be occupied’. This statement was part of a sequence of statements justifying how easy it had been for the participants to become a head teacher. This finding corresponds with Wangui’s (2012) research, wherein the principal position was offered to the participants only when they found themselves taking over the responsibilities of the position without applying for it. Sarah added further justification for the relative ease with which teachers could secure appointment as head teachers:

> There was reluctance amongst teachers to become principals because all teachers knew how hard it is to fulfil a headship's responsibilities, the management allowance was unavailable to principals with teachers and head teachers were receiving the same salaries.

In a survey by Cranston (2007), the demanding responsibilities of school headship were deemed to be the key reason for female principals not to seek the position. A similar reluctance to becoming school principals was reported among Hansen’s (2014) participants, which is consistent with other studies that highlight that women lack confidence in applying for promotion and are relatively hesitant in making career moves despite having appropriate qualifications (Coleman, 2007; Shapira, Arar and Azaiza, 2011). In this study, however, there is another aspect which relates to the lack of a corresponding financial reward for the increased responsibilities of headship position. As such, other forms of reward which go beyond financial rewards should be conceivable.

My participants reported more than one way towards the appointment as a head teacher and provided varied explanations for accepting their respective positions. Some participants were nominated by their predecessors in the role, with the Educational Supervision Bureau, for the most part, supporting their nomination. Several participants strongly implied that the MoE simply wanted to fill the headship vacancies, especially when candidates immediately became head teachers without meeting the necessary requirements. For instance, Hanan reported:

> When the principal retired, she selected me to be the new head teacher and recommended me to the Educational Supervision Bureau colleagues. I then agreed to send an application. Within a week, I became the leader of the school without having to undergo any tests or interviews. At the time, there were no specific conditions to becoming a head teacher.

Similarly, in a previous study, female head teachers in Kenya identified three factors that eased their advancement to the school principal positions; these included 'head teachers being transferred, head teachers passing away, a new school being opened' (Wangui, 2012, p. 61).

Hanan's case sheds light on the absence of a procedure or system in place for recruiting head teachers. Laila's narration offers another example: she was transferred directly from a teaching position to leading the school. She hesitated to take over this responsibility as she had no experience in academic administration, as she had initially applied for the position of assistant head teacher. However, her school principal proposed her for headship, again with the support of the regional Educational Supervision Bureau. Speaking about her experience, Laila said:

> I was not sure of what to decide but when I called my husband seeking his advice, he encouraged me to accept and I did…. I wasn't fully informed about the duties and I had no idea about the headship responsibilities, especially since there were new regulations and instructions issued from the MoE.

Laila's story can be linked to the eight female high school principals in Eckman's (2004) study, the researcher found that 'all of the females acknowledged that without direct encouragement they would never have considered educational administration, and in particular the high school principalship, as career options' (p. 198). Laila's feelings about accepting her position suggest that she lacked confidence about making a decision on her own over accepting her new role. As discussed in previous chapters, her lack of independence in this regard gives an insight into the gendered society in Saudi Arabia, as she passively accepted her husband's decision. Her narrative also reveals that she felt she was neither adequately qualified nor prepared to take on new responsibilities required of her by the MoE.

The overriding trend in the data is thus that job vacancies were the most significant facilitator in participants attaining a headship position. Several participants had the opportunity to become a principal because of a previous head teacher's retirement, leave, or transfer to another school. This way of rising to the principalship has many similarities to the analysis of Wangui's (2012, p. 61), who stated 'in most cases the women's path to leadership was, in a way, unplanned'. However, being appointed in this role was not perceived by some participants as a promotion. Sarah, for example, stated that, 'it's not an honorific position, it was a burden'. Her comment suggests that

the majority of participants were only too aware of the position's responsibilities and obligations. Hasna also agreed, saying: 'I used to see my head teacher worry all the time as she had great responsibility'. She went further by admitting that nominated head teachers shared the belief that they would be blamed for everything that occurred in their schools.

Hasna was not the only participant to observe that being a head teacher was a source of continuous stress. This awareness created a sense of uncertainty for many of them when they were offered the positions. The participants may be embracing their culture's perceptions of women as incapable of leadership, leading to their hesitation framing their decisions to become a school principal.

In the case of Ebtsam, her encouraging upbringing, in addition to her four years of experience as a teacher and assistant head teacher, drove her to see her nomination as a positive challenge:

> I accepted this position because I liked to develop and improve our schools, and, as I told you earlier, I have studied and worked in schools which follow routine and lack creativity and I know how bad it feels.

Ebtsam's husband, however, refused to allow her to accept her nomination: 'he said to me, forget it and focus on your home and children' which, as highlighted above, reflects the widely acceptable social construct of the role of women in highly patriarchal societies (Al-Qaradwi, 1998; Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Arar, 2018). She nonetheless insisted she accept the nomination: 'I knew it would be difficult, but I thought it would be my chance and I took it'. Her motivation and drive to create a positive change could

be attributed to her prior experience in a leadership role, which other participants lacked. Ebtsam saw that her training may have prepared her better for her new position and given her the confidence she needed, stating that 'I learnt a lot from my previous head teachers in both schools'. Ebtsam's story clarifies the role of early childhood and upbringing in enabling participants to make their own decisions with respect to accepting the nomination for headship, in clear contrast to the case of Laila above.

Self-motivation has been found to be a significant contributor to the rise of women to leadership roles in the work of Cheung and Halpern (2010) and Oplatka (2006). This is contrary to the findings in this study where, except Sarah for instance, most of female head teachers were not really self-motivated to aspire to the position. However, given the high level of cultural and institutional barriers in most developing countries, women still rise to leadership in the exceptional circumstances of having family support that counteracts the socially constructed views against female leadership (Al-Jaradat, 2014; Muzvidziwa, 2014; Schmidt and Mestry, 2015). However, the narratives in this study confirm the numerous prior findings regarding women being underrepresented in the headship positions because of internal barriers (Acker 1995, Cubillo and Brown, 2003; Kaparou and Bush; 2007; Lam, 2006; Oplatka; 2006). This can be attributed to numerous personal factors shared by some participants in this study, for example, lack of confidence, lack of awareness, lack of aspiration, fear of failure, poor self-esteem, limited mobility, and personal characteristics.

7.3 Head Teachers' Perspectives on their Roles and Performance

This section examines the participants' perspectives on their roles as head teachers and their performance. Muijs and Harris (2003) emphasized the importance of the principal's role in their school, a view reflected in the general consensus among participants that the head teacher should have the greatest role in the school. They perceived that the principal was the 'driver' of the school, and therefore should be involved in all decisions, relating to every single issue in the school. Thus, in the context of leadership, the aspects highly emphasized are 'influence' and 'vision' (Bush, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Matthews and Crow, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2007) with leadership perceived more of a practice than a process (Handy, 2012; Kotter, 1999; Richards and Engle, 1986; Schermerhorn, 1999).

Hanan highlighted this aspect of the role, saying that:

> The principal is the person who distributes the tasks and creates a friendly environment to promote creative and successful work. The school is like the network and the head teacher is the central point who supervises the systematic and collaborative work in the school.

Jawas (2017) argues that female leadership positions should be supported by appropriate levels of power and authority especially in societies where these are culturally embedded in gender constructs. Unfortunately, the women in this study could not exercise such authority and power, as their involvement in school decisions was affected by the limited power and authority given to them by the MoE. These findings are consistent with other studies in the context of Saudi Arabia (Alharbi, 2014; Alzaidi, 2008;

Alsharari, 2010) and Pakistan as revealed in Taj's (2016) study. Further, the vast majority of female head teachers in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the regulations issued by the MoE regarding principals' authority and power. They felt that the power and authority given to them by the MoE was restrictive as it neither helped them to manage their schools effectively nor gave them enough space to be involved in making the decisions they regarded as important. In the absence of power and authority, it becomes a challenge to influence subordinates and also spearhead institutional change. With reference to leadership styles, for instance, transformational leadership, which requires a combination of different power sources (e.g. position, personal, expertise, resources) (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010; French and Raven, 1959; Northouse, 2018), is almost inconceivable in this context. With such limited power and authority, the challenge to engage subordinates to strive towards a common objective is heightened. However, whilst this limited power and authority might be conceived as undesirable from the perspectives of the head teachers, determining an appropriate level of power that should be allocated to such positions becomes highly subjective considering the dysfunctional aspects of power (see section 3.4).

This finding confirms the perceptions of female principals in East Province (Mathis, 2010) and Jeddah city in KSA (Laila, 2015), who asserted that the authority given to them by the MoE did not enable them to be decision makers. Although my participants had some involvement in making certain decisions, such as setting up school schedules, distributing duties among the staff, and supervising administrative work, they perceived these as minor internal issues and accordingly could not influence the strategic decisions and direction of the schools they ran. Viewed from the perspective of leadership styles, the autonomy that allows for the establishment of school vision,

goals, modelling best practices and allowing for participation in management (Gozukara and Simsek, 2015; Hughes and Silva, 2013), and which characterises transformational leadership, did not exist for the participants. Aspects of transactional and managerial leadership styles might be conceivable, given their alignment to more bureaucratic and hierarchical structures (Agosto, 2012; Bush, 2011). However, the resource power needed to influence a reward system for transactional leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Bass and Bass, 2009; Yukl, 2013) is also very limited given that school budgets and plans are centrally dictated. In this respect, other reward systems are needed to compensate for this limited resource power.

Further, the idea that 'women have no authority and should not have' is maintained across many different cultures, (Al-Jaradat, 2014; Chin et al., 2008). This inequitable notion directly impacted on participants in this study, ultimately minimizing their leadership roles. Sarah in particular expressed her unhappiness at her limited level of involvement in making vital decisions for her school:

> According to the MoE's regulations, we don't have the right to make solid decisions by ourselves: we have to consult the Educational Supervision Bureau on school matters. We don't have the authority to transfer students or teachers. We cannot make decisions to open new classes without appealing to the MoE. I mean our roles are constrained by the MoE's regulations.

Participants' perceptions of the restrictions of their roles reflect the current centralised educational system in Saudi Arabia. In many important decisions they had to seek permission and approval from the MoE. This centralised policy of decision-making,

as applied by the MoE, negatively influenced the participants' performance in managing their schools. Numerous studies have described school principals in KSA as being directed by the MoE, in that their roles do not exceed the execution of MoE's decisions; the MoE keeps decision-making firmly at the top of the hierarchy (Alakarni, 2014; Alharbi, 2014; Hamdan, 2005; Mathis, 2010; Alsharari, 2010). Hasna commented on her role, saying:

> When I want to make any decision regarding a matter in my school, I have to go back to the MoE or to the Administrative Supervisor… I'm [only] partly involved in making the decision and this unfortunately hinders school development… I'm completely dissatisfied with my authority and power. Restrictive authorities are not real authorities… sometimes dealing with them is wasting time because they are far removed from the actual situation of the school.

Hasna's views shed light on the extent of involvement of the MoE in female secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Her comments also highlight the frustration and despair faced by some of the head teachers because of the MoE's lack of knowledge of the conditions and circumstances of the schools. Such weaknesses are typical of centralised educational systems (Cullen et al., 2003; Somerset, 2011) which increase calls for more decentralisation (Meemar, 2014; Rizzo, 2017).

Ebtsam also expressed her dissatisfaction with the role given to her as a principal in making decisions. Her opinion was that this role hindered her from developing the school and achieving success:

> The MoE assigned a low role to me which did not help in gaining achievements. Their regulations are unsatisfactory for enthusiastic principals like me. It makes me feel frustration, as I am being continuously questioned on each decision I take… we are supposed to work together as a team to achieve a mutual goal, but unfortunately the MoE and Educational Supervision [Bureau] do not trust principals, so we have to seek permission before dealing with any matter in their schools.

Ebtsam's comments seem to suggest that she felt incapacitated in the role given to her. Despite her willingness to be actively involved in her school, in working together as a team to achieve a mutual goal (an aspect of transformational leadership (Bush, 2007)) and also work in collaboration with the MoE, she was not given the autonomy and power she needed to achieve her goals. Instead, her passive role appeared to create a sense of her untrustworthiness as a principal in the eyes of the MoE.

According to some participants' perspectives, the MoE excluded them from playing a greater role in making essential decisions such as recruiting and dismissing teachers, transferring students and teachers, contracting with catering companies, managing school buildings and setting a discipline system in the school. Some participants tended to describe their role as one of decision-executing rather than a decision-making. For instance, Modi said:

> In terms of the principal's role in making decisions, the MoE gave me a moderate or low role. We have a highly centralised educational system and this centralisation exhausted school principals. The MoE did not confer

> with them or take their views on important issues… they did what the MoE asked them to do, and no more than that.

The role given to head teachers by the MoE was perceived as insignificant by some participants. Sabah, for example, felt overburdened with administrative tasks due to the limitations of the role:

> Sometimes, I feel the head teacher in the school is like a servant. She just spends all her school day replying to the letters that come from Educational Supervision Department. Or sometimes, mailing the MoE asking for explanations about their unclear new decisions. I think that her role is not significant, she appeals to the MoE to ensure necessary requirements for the school.

Similarly, Haifa's narration suggests that the role of the head teacher has no real authority or power attached to the position. She seemed to discount the principal's role and involvement in the running of a school, saying, 'the head teacher's duties can be done by any other employee in the school. This role just involves doing routine tasks like filing, receiving mails from the MoE, informing teachers of the MoE's decisions and documenting them'. It appears that Sabah's and Haifa's perceptions of the principal's role were highly influenced by the centralised education system in Saudi female secondary schools. In their opinion, such a system, which afforded them the bare minimum of power and authority, was restrictive and not a true reflection of the conception of the role of a head teacher as the 'driver' and centre of the school held by some participants prior to their appointment. Such conceptions of head teacher role as 'driver' and 'centre' could be susceptible to heroic leadership bias (see section 3.4) in which head teachers perceive their contributions to be greater than others.

Again, similar to the majority of participants' stories, the centralisation of decision-making processes combined with women lacking power and authority are common findings reported in the literature on Saudi women's education (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Al-Zaidi, 2008; Laila, 2015). Further, the participants' roles are influenced by their belief in the importance of showing respect for MoE authority rather than challenging it, even when they perceived it as misleading (Mathis, 2010).

While most participants spoke about the challenges they faced regarding the power and authority given to them by the MoE, two participants out of twelve felt that its regulations regarding the principal's role were enough to achieve the schools' objectives. Halima and Reem believed that more power and authority for the principals did not necessarily help in the development of education in the schools. This perspective highlights that power has a double-edged effect which could be abused if unchecked (Collinson, 2014). As such, there is always a trade-off that exists with power. In this case, the extent to which more power could contribute to better school climate for attainment of educational objectives or could result in dysfunctional behaviour that diminishes school effectiveness. Reem captures the dysfunctional aspects of power in stating that:

> Most head teachers do not want authority to improve their schools, they just want to feel the power. They want to decrease their responsibilities and at the same time increase their authority. They want to have the right of making decisions regarding disciplining and discharging teachers. If this happened, the schools would be the zone for conflict. This would not improve the educational work in the school.

Reem's views are in contrast with some of the other participants, as she felt that more power would result in the abuse of a principal's authority. Her experience seems to suggest that she may have gone through a negative encounter with head teachers who mis-used the power given to them. Reem's perspective also echoes the dangers of increased power asymmetries in schools which could result in a substitution of critique with an expressive contribution (Collinson et al., 2018) to head teacher's views, and thus, privileging the head teacher position even more.

Although Modi was dissatisfied with the authority given to head teachers by the MoE, she nonetheless offered a justification for such a limited level of authority. Modi believed that most female principals in the educational field at the time were not eligible to lead schools as they were not qualified enough to make sufficient decisions. She stated:

> In fact, most principals were chosen for this position without any conditions or requirements. Some of them brought a medical report indicating that they cannot stand for a long time in class and cannot teach. And others wanted to be principals because they thought they would have power in their hands.

Modi's view raises further concerns regarding the potential creation of school environments susceptible to power abuse. In this case, the possibility of power substituting abilities and skills. As such, acknowledging 'the potential for the abuse of power that invariably arises' (Tourish, 2013, p. 21) in such situations offers a critical perspective underlying this study. Thus, it's not only about giving more power, as highlighted by

most participants, but also the extent of such power to which the positive results always exceed the associated negative effects.

Further, commenting on the process after recruitment, Modi added that:

> The problem is not only the way they are appointed, it becomes more complicated after that. You cannot see improvements in the school. Meanwhile, they also do not try to develop themselves professionally by researching, reading, or participating in training courses. The MoE, on the other hand, does not follow up the principals after appointing them or assessing their performance.

Modi's remarks indicate that she had a different perspective on the expected role of a head teacher from that of other participants. For her, the continuous professional development of head teachers is crucial to the effective leadership of a school. Her views also shed more light on the role of the MoE's power, which is centred on the recruitment process and does not expand beyond. In this regard, her views are similar to those of Hasna, as both participants spoke about the MoE being unaware of the actual situations within the schools.

A key similarity between Halima and Reem's perceptions of their roles is that as school principals they were managing the schools rather than leading them. Like the participants in other studies, they accepted the MoE's policy, and they were keen to implement and execute the instructions and goals formulated by the ministry (Bush, 2007; 2008). Mathis (2010) found that the Saudi MoE lists school principals as managers;

the main purpose of the role is to keep the school running smoothly whilst implementing its regulations (Mathis, 2010). A further key element in defining leadership, widely discussed in the literature, lies in influencing others rather than exercising authority over them (Bush, 2008). This perception was absent in my participants' stories, which may give more evidence about my participants being managers. As a result, the closely aligned leadership style is that of managerial leadership with the focus being on fulfilling the functions, tasks and deliberations (Agosto, 2012; Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Leithwood et al., 1999) of the MoE. Thus, there is a strict requirement to meet rules and targets of the MoE.

7.4 Perceived Challenges in Headship Experiences

This section presents the main findings resulting from the analysis; it revealed that female head teachers experienced various challenges in making decisions while managing their schools. The extent of these challenges varied among the participants and was influenced by their cultural beliefs attaching to their role and by their personal characteristics. While most participants encountered all of these challenges, a few experienced only some of them. The common obstacles that emerged from the analysis were: the role of the centralised education system, female educational supervision, barriers to communication, handling financial issues, fear of accountability, and the pressures of dual responsibilities. These challenges are interwoven; each barrier influences, and is influenced by, others.

7.4.1 Role of the Centralised Education System

The participants' narratives clearly indicate that the MoE is the only policy making and administrative body for education in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned above with reference to their statements, this ministry has sole authority for setting regulations, without the involvement of head teachers or teachers. The MoE is the only partly responsible for opening new schools and classes, scheduling and specifying activities, and controlling the transfer, appointment and the promotion of all teachers throughout the country. It has also the right, via its local educational authorities across the country, to accept, transfer, and discipline students within individual schools. This confirms Mathis' (2010) view that the MoE envisions the school principals as managers rather than leaders; their duties lie in upholding and implementing the MoE's decisions (Grint, 2002; Stanley, 2006). However, in light of this centralised system, the head teachers in this study found themselves unable to take the decisions that could improve or enhance teachers' and students' performances. They simply found themselves required to perform the MoE's instructions. Further, participants felt that the MoE left only the most low-level decisions for them to deal with, reducing their role to a succession of programmed, routine duties which were not perceived as real authority: 'we apply regulation, we do not make it'. This aligns to the managerial leadership style which focuses on managing the school activities successfully (Dressler, 2001; Eacott, 2015) in line with MoE requirements.

The participants identified several instances that challenged their leadership clearly linked to the centralised education system applied by the MoE. Hasna spoke about the MoE making new decisions without involving or consulting school principals, saying:

> I mean, sometimes the MoE makes new decisions which are usually unclear and have no transparency. This creates a kind of blunder among the principals. The MoE sometimes allows a thing and at other times bans it.

She gave an example of a decision regarding a colleague's maternity leave, which was reduced from two months paid leave down to forty days, with only a few months' gap between the two decisions. Hasna's account seems to suggest that such sudden decisions taken by the MoE without any regard for or consultation of the staff involved lead to confusion and ambiguity hindering effective management of the school.

Therefore, with reference to leadership styles, participants seemed to adopt the managerial model of leadership in leading their school as their main concerns were attending successfully to the MoE's regulations rather than formulation of a new vision for the schools (Bush, 2015). The opportunity and environment necessary to take any other leadership approach is limited. Bush (2007) indicates that such a managerial leadership style is well-suited to the needs of principals working under this centralised educational system. Similarly, Agosto (2012) argues that the leadership approach is a good fit for a highly bureaucratic education system that employs a top-down decision-making structure (see also Bennett and Anderson, 2003).

Another instance that highlights the inefficiency of the centralised educational system in Saudi Arabia is highlighted by Wedad, who suffered from a lack of autonomy in responding to new developments in her school. This lack of autonomy has been highlighted in other studies (Almaki et al., 2016; Alyami, 2014) and, in the context of leadership approaches, makes transformational leadership difficult such that new direction,

change or development is hard to implement. Wedad related her experience of trying to make contact with the MoE as she did not have the authority to open or organise new classes in her school:

> I did write to the MoE about the large number of students in the classes. Both students and teachers complained about over-crowded classes, and parents complained as well. I was distressed because I did not know what to do or say to them. I contacted the MoE and they did not get back to me for four months.

Wedad's frustration is apparent in her complaint about the poor response of the MoE and their lack of understanding of the difficult situation in her school.

Another example which shows the lack of the head teacher's authority can be found in Hanan's inabilty to deal with teachers' issues in her school. She spoke about a teacher who had been coming to work exactly two hours late for the previous three years, saying 'there's nothing in my power to do anything about it except to notify her, which hardly affects careless people'. Hanan's feelings highlight her disappointment with a system that does not give her any autonomy or power to set rules and regulations in her own school, leaving her with no means of dealing with such situations. Thus, Hannah could not institute a system of reward, penalties and punishments as she lacked the position and resource powers (French and Raven, 1959) necessary for transactional leadership.

A further explanation by Sarah shows how the limitations of the power of the head teacher affect the educational outcomes of the school, and the commensurate reduction

in the status and value of the principal at her school. She said, ‘what bothers me the most at work is when the matter comes to students’ learning; negligent teachers are unqualified and do not want to develop or accomplish anything. There is nothing I can do about it’. Sarah’s helplessness is clear when she implies that, if she did possess the authority and power to guide her teachers towards professional development, she would do so. Sarah’s concern in leading her school might be linked to the managerial model of leadership where the school leader concentrates on the core aims of the school, which are teaching, learning, and the behaviour of teachers in working with students (Bush, 2007). However, there is also the aspect that she wants to inspire others to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the school (Khan and Varshney, 2013; Wilson, 2013) through motivating them to engage in professional development. This requires, however, not only the power, but good and effective communication (Northouse, 2018) in order to influence major change in the attitudes and presumed assumptions of the school staff. This adds to the challenge of instituting change given the gendered socio-cultural perspective on female leadership.

Ebtsam’s narrative provides a similar example in terms of a lack of authority to discipline students. She expressed frustration at not having the independence to manage and control student behaviour on her own without referring to the MoE. This was accompanied by the absence of an adequate list of students' school misbehaviour and accompanying penalties. Ebtsam expressed her regret when discussing the unacceptable misconduct of one of her students and her inability as a head teacher to deal with it:

> According to the regulations set by the MoE, the principal is required to follow up students closely. But when I look at the authority given to me as

> principal regarding this, then all I am allowed to do is to notify and call the student's guardian, do you think this is an ideal resolution? What can be done when these methods do not work? There needs to be stricter measures I can take, in order to deter the student and to stop her from influencing others. The MoE does not offer flexibility to me in this simple issue. I can evaluate the problem but the MoE gives me no room to make the proper decision.

Here it can be inferred that Ebtsam hoped to practice the transformational model of leadership where she could develop school vision, structure, and demonstrating students and teachers' performance (Bush, 2007). Unfortunately, her ability to put this into practice was constrained by the MoE's prescription; her example shows that the actual level of authority given by the MOE to the principal prevents head teachers from effectively following its regulations when dealing with difficult students. Consequently, head teachers face a frustrating situation, with participants expressing they feel their efforts in creating an effective learning atmosphere in their schools are continually hindered.

7.4.2 Barriers to Communication

The majority of participants voiced their dissatisfaction about their communication with the MoE's employees on several occasions, particularly when they encountered unforeseen problems in their schools. This communication process was a frustrating issue for the female head teachers, who were not allowed to visit the MoE due to the cultural segregation between men and women (Alsweel, 2009; Hamdan, 2005). As a

result, the only means they had to establish contact with the ministry was via letters or telephone, which created a range of obstacles to the process.

For example, as in Wedad's narration above, at the beginning of the academic year she received extra students and decided to open new classes. However, she first had to contact the MoE to obtain their approval, a process that stalled her efforts for four months. She expressed disappointment and frustration at the lengthy procedures that left pressing school business unresolved, saying: 'contacting the ministry is supposed to be systematic. When we contact them, we have to wait a long time for a response. We do not know what and when they will reply to us'. However, my participants believed that this communication challenge rooted from their gender. A similar experience was reported in UK when Coleman (2007) found that female head teachers faced discrimination from governors and other members in their communities based on their gender. The Sri Lankan participants of Arachchi and Edrisinghe (2011) reported comparable difficulties in their relations with the higher officers in their respective education authorities.

Another issue reported by the participants was the difficulty of establishing contact with the MoE over the phone, the process being described as extremely slow and inefficient. When the head teachers made inquiries regarding their schools' matters, they phoned the MoE's employees, who were always men. The head teachers expressed that the ministry's employees did not understand their demands or requirements. It is possible that this problem resulted from the MoE employees' lack of communication skills, as they were less educated than the head teachers. This issue also raises the

problems inherent in a gender-segregated system as there was no face to face interaction between women and men.

Furthermore, some of the participants' narratives suggest that the male employees adhered to the existing norms, highlighting cultural stereotypes of women, a finding supported in the extant literature (Smith, 2008). They did not appear to accept the leadership of women or felt that they were better leaders than the women, and consequently treated the head teachers in an improper manner. It seems that this perception of women was also shared by other male staff in the schools including (caretakers, servants, and drivers) Wedad said:

> Some of the ministry's officials treat us as women, not as leaders. I told the minister, when I met him, 'the officials in the ministry don't respect us, they don't understand that we are responsible and delegated, and they deal with us as ladies'.

Speaking about another incident when the school's caretaker was lazy and careless in discharging his duties, she reported receiving the response: ''I do not take orders from you.' I reported him to the MoE but unfortunately, they did not do anything. They might have said to him: 'do not worry, she is woman, do not care, she cannot threaten you'. These aspects show the highly gendered character of female leadership in the context of Saudi Arabia. The gendered relations and patterns of the society have permeated the educational setting (Archer and Lloyd, 2002; Burr, 2015). As a result, regardless of the position of leadership, these social constructs hold individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations (Lorber, 1994). The staff and society in

general do not see the position, but the gender (Schmidt and Mestry, 2015), as leadership has been associated with men due to a complex web of traditions, culture, religion and politics (LeGates, 2001).

Other participants said that they tended to avoid calling the MoE on certain matters as they did not want to face humiliation and disrespect from the male employees. However, their leadership performance was subsequently affected by this psychological barrier, especially when the matter needed clarification from the MoE. This aspect further supports the argument that 'doing gender' in organisational settings manifests itself at the macro, and micro-levels (Abalkhail, 2017; Alvesson and Billing, 2009). These findings further support other studies (Alsufyan, 2002; Lindsey, 2010) that argue that women's abilities are usually overlooked at headship level by the MoE, largely due to the operation of gendered socio-cultural forces.

To cope with these communication issues, some participants sought help from their close male relatives, including husbands, fathers, and brothers, as this help was deemed socially acceptable in KSA (Alsweel, 2009; Rajasekar and Beh, 2013; Alakarni, 2014). Seeking help from relatives helped them to feel less disappointed, as they did not have to deal with the MoE employees directly. In addition, these relatives might also facilitate the school's request procedure and save time. For example, Manal said:

> Sometimes, I found myself inclined to seek help from my husband in my school's issues. I sent him to the MoE to chase the school's requirements because I cannot go there. My husband usually gets the ministry to execute the work, instead of useless calls or sending letters to the MoE.

Omair (2017, p. 25) described one aspect of the social construction of gender roles in KSA, stating that ‘women are likely to be seen as less capable of taking care of themselves because they are observed to require assistance from male relatives to complete activities necessary for their daily lives’. Manal’s experience highlights the dependency of women on male sections of society both in their official and private lives. However, this reliance on male relatives did not always result in a positive outcome, as the case of Haifa shows: her husband refused to help her in contacting the MoE. She said ‘my husband does not want to help me; he says that his only responsibility is his home and not any other place. Honestly, this always raises problems between us’ (see the discussion of dual responsibilities below).

Although data from male head teachers was not collected in this study, it can be assumed that the communication barrier described by participants seems unlikely to have arisen in the case of male head teachers. The large separation between the genders shows that it was very difficult for members of the opposite sex to interact and communicate. As the educational officials were men, the female head teachers experienced severe restrictions in interaction with the ministry's employees. Visiting the MoE was culturally unacceptable, restricting head teachers’ abilities to follow up their schools' business in person, and consequently making them feel incapable. Most participants raised this issue as one that severely impacted upon their school management. For example, Hasna said:

> As I know, male and female head teachers have the same authority, but men can practice their authority without restriction or accountability unlike women. In our community a male teacher has absolute freedom to make

> relationships with others. He can go by himself to the MoE and take what he needs, unlike us. He is respected and trusted by the employees.

Hasna's statements confirm the notion that leadership is gendered within the Saudi culture; female head teachers perhaps would not encounter such challenges if they were men (Growe and Montgomery, 2000; Naidoo and Perumal, 2014). Viewing women as school leaders and having equal rights to men remains unacceptable in the participants' social context (Madsen, 2010). Furthermore, some scholars have also speculated that the failure of women to carry out leadership roles might not be a weakness, but a deliberate rejection of the masculine attributes associated with those positions (Moghadam, 2004). Lorber (1994) argues that the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is when the process is made invisible, and with this invisibility, the less powerful group can easily accept the status quo as natural. Thus, exposing these gendered perceptions attached to leadership becomes a powerful transformational force (Acker, 2006; Gatrell, 2010). As such, this presents an opportunity and not a threat.

7.4.3 Female Education Supervision

Analysis of the interviews shows that the influence of education supervisors appointed by the MoE was perceived as a further burden by the principals, forming a barrier to their leadership careers. As in the discussion above, the social construction of gender emerged as significant in understanding some of the challenges they faced. As the education supervisors appointed to oversee girls' schools were also female, the cultural restrictions that the participants encountered also applied to them. This meant that the

female supervisors faced similar difficulties in their communication process with the MoE. The regulations and instructions given by the MoE remained as vague for the female supervisors as they did for female principals, neither party being in direct contact with male officials. This restricted the education supervisors' abilities to clarify the regulations and instructions to the head teachers.

Collected data showed that some of the female educational supervisors were insufficiently qualified to advise, guide, direct, or supervise school leadership. Some participants reported that the education supervisors had no experience in education management and lacked basic communication skills. For instance, Ebtisam said: 'the regulations are not fully clear for the educational supervisors. So, when I ask them about a matter, they hesitate in replying or directly say no'. Ebtisam's view of the educational supervisors was that, 'they hinder our work: they always focus on the personal, secondary issues and ignore important work issues'. Similarly, Hanan believed that the supervisors 'like routine work and are reluctant to change and improve the educational process. They keep criticizing without giving logical justifications'.

A common observation among the participants was that the education supervisors were not supporters of their decisions, instead they were a source of disappointment and worry for the principals. For example, Modi expressed her dislike at receiving an education supervisor in her school in the following words:

> She devalued our performance and achievement in the school. For example, I conducted research to assess behaviour problems among students. The results of my research may help us in evaluating students' difficulties.

> Unfortunately, this effort was disapproved of and underestimated by the educational supervisor.

Modi's experience of educational supervisors indicates that they also posed serious challenges for the head teachers. Despite observing the actual situations in the schools during their visits, they were unable to offer meaningful assistance to the head teachers. Rather, as she highlighted in her narrative, some of them failed to communicate effectively on the head teachers' behalf to the MoE.

Sabah said she found that 'men were more understanding than women, having flexibility and objectivity when dealing with schools' issues'. The participants perceived that female supervisors paid more attention to inconsequential issues, rather than focusing on important matters. Sarah said: 'the educational supervisor focused on the page number system and punctuation rather than looking at the file's contents. She is naïve and moody'. Wedad believed that the female supervisor assessed her performance based only on addressing a narrow and subjective set of criteria, an assessment sometimes coloured by jealousy. She felt that female supervisor 'opposed a successful principal because she might take her position later'.

This practice of supervision influenced the effectiveness of the leadership of the female head teachers. From the participants' perspectives, the supervision process would be more effective if the educational supervisors were men. This corroborates Ashoi's (2013) results, which indicated that more than two thirds of the participants preferred their work leader being male rather than female and rejected the assumption that 'females are more effective in leadership than males'. Crucially, participants in this study

were not satisfied with female supervision and saw it as a barrier, while the male head teachers in Alzaidi's (2008) research felt satisfied with their relationship with male educational supervisors. This might be attributed to the role of local cultural perceptions, where female supervision is not preferred or acceptable (Ashoi, 2013). Whilst this reflects a widely-held socio-cultural gendered perception, Celikten (2005) argues that women seem to be their own worst enemies, working to undermine each other. In this respect, it might have been expected that female educational leaders would not support female supervisors.

7.4.4 Lack of Headship Training

In some education systems, when a new head teacher is appointed to their post, they expect to immediately receive compulsory in-service training delivered by the appropriate government body (Black, 2011; Browne-Ferrigno, 2013; Winton and Pollock, 2013; Yan and Ehrich, 2009). This practice may contribute to equipping them with the appropriate skills to be successful in leadership and management (Bush and Glover, 2003). Unfortunately, this was not the case with the participants of this study, none of them having a degree in educational leadership. Most of them were former teachers or deputy principals and had not received any formal training in school administration. From their perspective, having such training before and after appointment would improve their performance of their duties as head teachers. As Wedad pointed out:

> The MoE do not run a regular training program for us. I think they should do that in order to improve the head teachers' skills, who are facing different challenges in managing their schools. This training may help us to overcome the difficulties that we are encountering in our schools.

She felt that most female head teachers in the field needed to be trained in a range of skills including communication, management, problem solving and ICT skills. This was not only the case for Saudi women head teachers, but also for the participants of Moorosi's (2010) study, who asserted that their qualifications did not include training on headship skills and that they had never attended preparation training on management before they took over the position. In other countries, even those applying more centralised systems, training programs for head teachers are provided and reviewed, as in Canada (Winton and Pollock, 2013), China (Yan and Ehrich, 2009) and Kenya (Onguko et al., 2008).

While most participants indicated that no training was offered to them before they received their appointments, a few reported receiving training through the MoE upon being appointed as principals. However, these participants all reported that these courses were neither sufficiently specialised in developing leadership, nor sufficiently organised. Reem commented on a training workshop that she had attended, saying, 'Unfortunately, I didn't find what I was looking for. It wasn't helpful in fully understanding the regulations. I wish I could find training that helps in managing my school's problems'. Similar sentiments were shared by Hasna when she said:

> There are always new regulations and instructions and those need to be understood by a rehearsal. A new system or a new program or any change in the old system must be clarified and explained. They [the MoE] announce conducting training for headship but the question is: does this training truly enable head teachers to deal with the new regulation?

Laila insisted on the necessity of training not only for the head teachers but also for the teachers; she believed that training teachers would facilitate their management, 'some teachers are not able to deal with school regulations or students. Their deficiencies need to be carefully treated'. Thus, the lack of appropriate leadership training, combined with the impracticality of existing training in dealing with the real situation of schools contributed to the challenges that participants faced. This lack of headship training has been found to be of crucial importance to head teachers, as the quality of work relies on their training (Baker et al., 2007).

The issue of a lack of leadership training among Saudi female principals is a pervasive key finding in Saudi literature (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alakarni, 2014; Almaki, et al, 2016; Alzaidi, 2008; Mathis, 2010). In his doctoral thesis, Sabaih (2010) sought to identify the types of training needed for head teachers (male and female) in KSA; he found that his participants perceived several key areas in which training was absolutely necessary, these being: 'information technology and communication, which was the greatest need for both male and female head teachers due to their lack of knowledge and experience in this field; administrative requirements; staff development; student affairs; and local community' (p. 284).

7.4.5 Fear of Accountability

Female head teachers felt that they were working under pressure, as they feared they would be questioned about their performance in their role. This fear was underpinned by the ambiguity of the regulations, and other challenges already discussed, such as

poor communication with the MoE and lack of training. As Laila stated: ‘before accountability, we should be trained. It is not fair to implement accountability while regulations are ambiguous, and we did not receive any training’. However, the participants expressed that the fear of accountability made them hesitate in making decisions as they needed to think carefully about the outcomes of their decisions. Some of them felt that they would be blamed if something went wrong. The fear of being judged by officials owing to their gender rather than their performance without taking into account the challenges that they encountered was apparent in some of their comments. Although accountability is needed to ensure successful work, Reem felt that such practice was fundamentally punitive in this context, saying: ‘as we are female we are always accountable for everything we do in our schools. We are sometimes questioned and blamed by people who don’t understand the school conditions’. These demands for accountability aligned to gender could be perceived as the invisible promotion of gender ideologies (Bassi et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016).

Crucially, Reem’s statement indicates her fear of accountability, despite the fact that she reported (above) that she was satisfied with the level of authority and power given to her by the MoE. These conflicting statements suggest a complex relationship with the socially accepted gender roles, especially when considering her specific family circumstances in growing up without one of her parents (see chapter 5). Reem’s statements show the influence of cultural perspectives on gender role in their focus on those roles to the exclusion of the centralization of the education system. Hanan expressed a similar fear of the punitive powers of the MoE shaping her decision-making, saying that:

> I have ambition to improve my school, but I know that the MoE will not forgive me and punish me if I make the wrong decision, so I told myself: why should I put myself at risk of such a thing? I don't want to make myself vulnerable because of this climate of accountability.

As a result of being judged by the education officials in their demands for greater accountability, some participants tended to avoid making decisions wherever possible. For example, Sabah said:

> I hesitate when it comes to making decisions about internal issues in the school, [as] the supervision department criticized my decision without convincing justification. Sometimes I take back my decision.

Such statements reveal fundamental differences in understandings of the purpose and process of accountability between head teachers and education officials. For the principals, accountability was a punitive measure rather than an opportunity to learn from their failures, whereas the officials appear to have conceptualised it as a means of blaming the head teachers rather than an opportunity to encourage them. As such, this ongoing and one-sided set of practices in the name of accountability ultimately created a sense of fear and among the participants when utilizing their leadership skills.

Participants' fears of accountability reinforce their roles as managers rather than leaders; they were eager to follow and accomplish the decisions and regulations given by the MoE (Bush, 2007; 2008). The demands for accountability align with the focus on management responsibilities that requires the overseeing of performance of centrally designed objectives (Bennett and Anderson, 2003; Bush, 2007; Dressler, 2001). This

makes the managerial leadership style, which seems to be the only possible option, suitable to the centralisation of the education system (Bush, 2007). Again, according to Mathis (2010), the Saudi MoE conceives of the school principal as a manager rather than a leader; school principals are primarily responsible for executing the MoE's regulations and decisions. Further, gender issues clearly contribute to female principals' attitudes to accountability: participants were aware that leadership is gendered and thus saw themselves as uniquely vulnerable in the face of scrutiny.

7.4.6 Managing Financial Issues

One of the most important responsibilities of the school principal is managing a school's financial affairs, which involves the disbursement of money (Green, 2001). Decisions regarding school budgets are governed by regulations issued by the MoE, with the majority of participants reporting funding shortages. Hanan expressed dissatisfaction with the budget allocations for her school, saying:

> One of the main challenges I encountered is that the MoE does not provide us enough financial support. We don't have enough money to achieve our objectives. For example, I'm thinking of improving the school environment, but I don't have enough money to do so. If I asked for extra money, they wouldn't send it.

Other participants expressed a similar sense of disappointment at the challenges posed by the insufficient budget allocations for their schools. Despite devoting substantial time to setting up plans for various projects, their hopes remained unrealised. Wedad,

for example, had planned to establish 'a digital library, but the budget didn't help'. Similarly, Sabah hoped to:

> Supply the school with electronic devices and equip the library with all resources that the students needed, including new books and tools which would help them in accessing knowledge easily. Also, the school buildings needed refurbishment in order to run various activities.

Modi spoke about the lack of flexibility and autonomy in terms of expenditure, a finding reflected in Sabaih's (2010) study. She pointed out the need to have small budgetary surpluses with which to meet unexpected contingencies in a timely manner, saying: 'every single school has unique conditions that are different from other schools. Sometimes an unanticipated financial problem appears that needs to be resolved immediately'. Likewise, the six female leaders in urban school districts in Fuller's (2016) study all identified lack of money as the largest barrier that they faced and the most significant factor disrupting their work. Further, female academic leaders in Almaki et al.'s (2016) study felt that they lacked the freedom to make financial decisions in their universities. Modi highlighted the complexity of the issue, pointing out that some head teachers lacked adequate skills in financial management. This can be explained by the tradition of excluding women from the control of financial issues at home, where domestic and family finances are always controlled by men. This confirms the importance of providing training for principals to prepare them for the work of managing school budgets and expenditure (Sabaih, 2010).

As the data shows, most participants talked about managing financial affairs as a serious challenge. It can be inferred that this is a result of a complex of interacting challenges, each of which increases the complexity and severity of the financial situation. These include the demands of a centralised education system, problems in communication, and a lack of training in leadership. These overlapping challenges worked to create a prevailing mood of uncertainty and vulnerability among the participants when both planning and executing financial decisions.

7.4.7 Dual responsibilities

The majority of female head teachers participating in this study felt that they were exhausted by their dual personal and professional responsibilities. As summarised above, all participants were married with families, leading different lives at home. They spoke about the challenges of handling their home duties and the demands of their work, as they had to attend to both sets of responsibilities. From the participants' cultural perspective, the fundamental role of Saudi women was maintaining their home, including caring for their children and husbands (Alamro, 2012; Alwedinani, 2016; Hamdan, 2005). The home is conceptualised as the woman's first work place, and marriage deemed the most important part of family life in Saudi culture. This socially constructed role of gender has been highlighted in several studies as a hindrance to leadership progression (Eagly, 2007; Northouse, 2018; Watts, 2009).

Some participants highlighted the negative effects of these dual responsibilities on the management of their school. Laila felt exhausted from balancing her leadership responsibilities and home duties, wherein she gave priority to her home. This priority

clearly reflects upon her background, as discussed in chapters five and six, rather than her attitudes towards her job:

> As you know, we are women and we have to tidy up our home in the morning and prepare our children for school. Headship is filled with problems, especially at examination times, [but also] including teachers' absence and managing students… I have to deal with all these responsibilities at the same time. This impacts negatively on my home and kids.

Similar to Laila, Haifa stated that: 'sometimes I feel sick from these duties, honestly, every morning I am thinking to resign from work. When they saw me busy all the time on the phone and working at home, they told me to just resign'. This points to a lack of appreciation from her family and a sense of disrespect for her career, all of which shows its impacts in her discussions of her work. Halima likewise stated that it was very difficult for her to achieve the same level of success at home and work at the same time: 'I have sacrificed, and I was under constant stress before I divorced'.

The stress of working women attempting to discharge dual responsibilities is widely reported in the literature (Benson, 2013; Parker, 2015; Sanchez and Thornton, 2010; Stewart, 2014), but these effects are particularly pronounced in the current study. Participants regularly implied that local cultural perspectives force them to live almost literal double lives, adopting a very different character at home where their lack of power and agency forces them to act differently.

Some participants tended to perceive their roles differently within the home and at school. Sabah believed that relinquishing the role of decision-making at home was a

way to avoid problems with her husband during marriage. She said, ‘my husband has the final say. Even if I sometimes share my opinion, the final say is that of my husband’. She concluded that this practice had its roots in her early childhood experience as discussed in Chapter 6: ‘when I was living with my parents, although my siblings and I had a relationship filled with respect for them, my father and brothers were the ones to call the shots’. Her comments highlight the gender inequality that exists in the Saudi society where domestic labour, from cooking to childcare, is the exclusive responsibility of women. It also reflects that despite making notable progress in the management of their schools, they are still considered to be unable to lead within the walls of their homes.

As noted in Chapter five, these social restrictions can be seen through the lens of social constructionism, which points to historical and cultural factors in constructing these limitations (Burr, 2003). The perception of Sabah as lacking the agency to make decisions by her siblings and her husband is consistent with the stereotypes of Saudi women. Arabian Gulf societies generally believe that the optimal position for women is their home, whilst, culturally, the position of leadership is connected solely with men (Al-Lamky, 2007). This should not be taken as suggesting that women have no say in decision-making in Saudi Arabia: rather, male decision-making takes priority, and women’s decision-making is restricted to a culturally feminine sphere.

Sabah’s case highlights a perspective of gender roles that offers significant contrasts to those prevalent in Western communities (Hallinger and Leithwood, 1998; Giuliano, 2017). Sabah can be seen as accepting these constructed roles, wherein men had a

more authoritative position in making decisions (Hamdan, 2006). Men are usually expected to meet the financial needs of a household, whereas women are expected to be the primary care providers; this includes managing school-related matters as well as domestic ones. These attitudes remain prevalent among all age groups in Saudi society: in a study conducted by Elamin and Omair (2010), they found that male Saudi university students retain these traditional attitudes toward Saudi working women.

Reem felt that she faced constant misunderstandings from the rest of her family regarding her role in the period surrounding her father's death. She felt that these attitudes discouraged her from informing them that she had re-joined work as a head teacher after a year's leave, stating: 'I am always cautious of telling them that I work as a head teacher as I do not want to show that I am passionate about my job'. She also highlighted that her family members always interpreted her home life based on her employment: 'if I suggest a restaurant to go to, they would say 'you are not a head teacher here'. They always misinterpret my behaviour'. Although Reem perceived herself to be competent in her leadership abilities, her family members routinely use the duality of her roles as a means of ignoring these abilities. Perhaps their attitude towards her could be understood in light of the existing cultural perspectives of gender roles in the different treatment of men and women. Reem's account highlights how the culture plays its part in shaping women's roles and contributes to gender inequities faced by women in institutional contexts. Social constructionism stresses that individuals are often forced to accept that they are being gendered and sexualized (Burr, 2003). Thus Reem, in the above case, can be viewed as recognizing the limitations and prohibitions placed upon her by the cultural perspectives of those around her (Burr, 2003), a recognition prevalent among the other participants in this study.

Having dual responsibilities is a very common challenge reported by female head teachers worldwide (Benson, 2013; Parker; 2015; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, 2010; Stewart, 2014; Sanchez and Thornton, 2010; Wrushen and Sherman, 2008). This challenge manifests itself more severely among participants who came from more strongly traditional backgrounds, such as Sabah, Laila and Haifa. This reflects other studies that consider how the social construction of women's roles as frequently embraced by individuals within Saudi culture (Hamdan, 2006).

As the above analysis shows, female head teachers faced severe challenges in their roles including power imbalances fostered by a centralised education system, communication barriers, conflicts with educational supervision, fear of accountability, limited training, difficulties in handling finical issues and dual responsibilities. The most prominent challenges facing head teachers in Saudi Arabia are more closely linked to the prevalent Saudi cultural, gender-based constructions of power and authority, rather than the centralisation of the education system in itself. Crucially, all participants, including Halima and Reem, when expressing satisfaction with the level of authority and power given to them by the MoE, shared the other participants' views regarding their fear of accountability, lack of training and dual responsibilities. This underlying similarity indicates the prevailing and powerful influence of social constructions of participants' gender on their professional life.

7.5 Perceived Influencers Affecting Leadership Performance and Skills

During the head teachers' careers as principals, they experienced a number of key factors that facilitated their leadership performance and could be considered as positive

influencers on their schools' management and progress. This section looks at the influencers which emerged from the participants' stories and helped them to cope with the above-mentioned challenges. These influencers include ongoing experience, social relationships and networks, family support, and personal characteristics.

7.5.1 Ongoing experiences

Improving leadership skills from ongoing experiences is evident among the head teachers. The accumulated professional experience helped participants in coping with the challenges that they encountered during their initial years in their posts. Modi, who had twelve years of experience as a head teacher, clearly indicated that her leadership skills had been developed by this accumulation of experience. She perceived her leadership skills as effective, stating: 'from the experiences I obtained, I can tell you that my fear and hesitation reduced in making decisions in my school, I certainly do my work for the benefit of the school and [in the] interest of all staff'.

The constructed understanding of leadership Modi has formed through her experience helped her to build a strong conception of her own identity, based upon which she can negotiate and defend her decision. Modi's willingness to develop the school and bring about meaningful change in its working practices can be considered as showing aspects of transformational leadership (Bass, 1999; Bush, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004). In this leadership style, the leader effectively works with the staff in order to make positive changes in the institution, and this kind of leadership improves teachers' motivation and job performance. This style of leadership envisions itself as a positive influence on teachers and students.

In her narrative, Modi expressed confidence in her style of leadership. She felt that she had made unambiguously beneficial contributions to community life, and that these contributions would protect her from being blamed or criticized. She asserted:

> I can say that from the experience I gained, I realized that no one can stand in the way of the person who works correctly, even if the actions taken are not listed within the administrative role, as long as it does not hurt anyone and serves the educational process and is built upon solid foundations of education and systematic planning, it will be successful.

Modi's model of collaborative effort, a core idea within the transformational model of leadership, explains her belief in making necessary changes without referring to the official administrative regulation (Bush, 2007). In fact, Modi's leadership skills are apparent in her belief that it requires a strong and effective leader to create change, as she did in her school. This change was evident in her initiative to set up a nursery in her school, running a successful pilot of this project before presenting it to the MoE, which, seeing the results of her success, launched the project throughout the schools in her city (see below). Modi's determination also shows that she had the ability and courage to take risks, but with a solid and clear vision of what she wanted to achieve. Although Modi did not specifically say transformational leadership, the aspects that she implied in this case can be related to the leadership style which involves taking initiatives to bring about change.

Sarah offered a distinctive perspective on the authority and power of her headship role in her narrative. In addition to her long experience in a headship position, the difficult circumstances of her childhood following the loss of her father (as discussed in chapter

5) inspired her and contributed positively to her experience as a head teacher. She believed that her leadership skills improved with time, asserting: ‘power and rights are taken and not given. It needs someone who seeks and fights for them, otherwise they will never come. From my experience, I've learnt that I can create my role in the school, I don’t want others to tell me how to act and what to do’.

Similarly, Hanan acquired competencies and skills in different domains of experience. She expressed the belief that, as her experience increased over the years, she had become more competent: ‘if I now faced those previous challenges, I would manage to overcome them easily’. Reem and Hasna likewise felt that their performances in school have improved over time. They highlighted that these challenging experiences had strengthened their leadership aspirations and increased their opportunities to succeed. Hasna, who had sixteen years of experience in a headship role, stated: ‘after vast experience, I would say that my motto in [my] work is power, wisdom, clarity, and solidity’.

Although female head teachers in this study had no degree or other higher qualification in management or leadership, they believed that their experiences in-post had significantly improved their performance. This confirms the statement repeatedly reported among Mathis’ (2010) participants, that ‘training and experience are better than education’. As such, the participants in this study confirm the findings of Sanchez and Thornton (2010) who reported that, by the time of their departure from their posts, female head teachers had become more satisfied with their performance in their leadership roles. However, it is also reasonable to assume that my participants tried to be assertive in their leadership roles to challenge cultural perceptions of their gender role

and they all did their best to confirm their personal abilities as women leaders (Coaxum-Young, 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012).

7.5.2 Social Relationships and Networks

Social relationships were another factor that influenced and sustained participants' leadership roles. Some of the participants enjoyed having extended families with a large circle of friends, relatives and acquaintances. This overlapping social network facilitated finding *wasta,* which can be translated as 'nepotism' or 'favouritism', though more strictly refers to the exploitation of social networks to accomplish goals. *Wasta* is well-known and pervasive in all Arab countries (Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq, 2016; Rehal, 2015); it often takes the form of having one's request fulfilled and goals achieved easily through patronage or the help of a person in power. In this study, some head teachers overcame their schools' issues and leadership challenges through *wasta*. They achieved this as a result of help received from a member of their social network who had contact or good rapport with someone in power in the MoE, or who held some other influential position. Ebtsam believed that *wasta* was the key to success, stating:

> I tended sometimes to use a special pathway to fix complicated problems through interpersonal relationship with the people in the MoE or *wasta*. For example, when I contact the ministry asking for equipment or facilities, they don't send these immediately unless I find *wasta*. Without the *wasta*, we can wait for a long time.

Wasta was perceived as the key to facilitation and timely action by the majority of participants. As Laila pointed out, 'it can ease procedures and save our time'. Hanan felt that in order for her decisions to be implemented she had to find *wasta*. Such relationships influenced her ability to make decisions: 'it made me intrepid'. Her comments regarding changing the end of the school day for older girls reflects the strong influence of the *wasta* that she obtained. Hanan talked about this experience in some detail:

> We (the principals) on many occasions prefer finding *wasta* to achieve what we want in our schools. Let me give you an example: we only have one exit [from school premises] which becomes crowded and dangerous at school closing times, causing chaos. So, I decided to allow the older students to leave ten minutes earlier, which the Educational Supervision Bureau objected to when they visited the school. They tried to return the situation to the way it was before, but the *wasta* that I had found supported my decision and protected me from accountability.

Sarah, on the other hand, appeared to give a greater emphasis to the influence of *wasta* when she said, 'In fact, without having *wasta* and personal relationships [with those in power], we can't move on'. This belief might be formed as a result of the poor response she received after numerous attempts at contacting the MoE for necessary services and maintenance. She also expressed her frustration by saying, 'after three months waiting to get the phone fixed, I finally contacted one of my relatives'. Her comment highlights the extent of their dependence on *wasta*. Hasna employed *wasta* when she experienced similar situations. Through her social network she was able to obtain eight air conditioners, which she had waited for the MoE to send for a long time, within a matter of

days. Similarly, the Qatari participants of Rehal's (2015) study perceived social networks as a significant key to facilitating leadership tasks and development.

However, in contrast to most head teachers' perception and belief in *wasta*, Hasna and Sabah felt that using *wasta* was a kind of corruption and an unfair practice. Sabah expressed her disgust at the spread of the *wasta* phenomenon among the female head teachers: 'I hate the administrative work because of the constant need for *wasta*'. These findings corroborate the suggestions of Badawood (2003) that head teachers viewed their position as socially important and worthy of strict professional integrity.

7.5.3 Family support

Although all participants believed that the recourse to KSA social norms challenged their decisions and leadership, on several occasions they felt supported by their family members, including parents, husbands, brothers, and sisters. From their perspectives, this family support contributed to their success as principals in making and implementing decisions. In several studies, the family members of female leaders have acted as role models in their leadership positions (Hansen, 2014; Moorosi, 2010; Murakami and Törnsen, 2017). Manal, whose aunt worked as a school principal, and whose father and husband worked as managers, received constant help from family members that strengthened her leadership abilities.

> I can say that I am surrounded by leaders in a constructive environment with support and development… I always talk about my duty and daily

> tasks particularly about any urgent matters or important things and considering their opinions and I may take their guidance if it suits me and my work.

Halima received support from her family members who worked in the same field, saying: ‘we are an educational family as one of my sisters is a head teacher, and the other one is a deputy head teacher and two of them are teachers’. When asked about the effect of this educational background, she indicated that there was constant conversation between them about their jobs and the issues they faced. She explained that these conversations facilitated her work and regularly provided her with the solutions that she needed: ‘we discuss our work and it helps me to respond to some hindrances and difficulties I face in my school’. Halima was involved in numerous conversations with educationists where she could exchange ideas about educational leadership; these experiences underpinned her abilities in management and leadership. When asked if she thought that this support was critical, she answered: ‘indeed, it is critical for me and I need it, especially if it comes from people I actually and completely trust’. Moorosi (2010) linked the performance of her participants with their early childhood experiences. As such, the early experiences and family background of my participants have underpinned their leadership abilities.

Wedad believed that her father was her main supporter; she felt she had gained the ability to engage with the system in her own school in a positive way from his professional role. Her father was an educational regional manager, from whom she learnt to be more flexible and adaptable in her own professional life when facing difficult circumstances. She claimed: ‘my father taught me to be more independent and think for

myself rather than relying on other people which was unusual for women in the Saudi culture'. While she lacked support from the Ministry of Education, she perceived she had still managed to be successful in supporting herself and her colleagues, as far as she could within her authority. Several studies have stressed that improving school vision and success largely depends on the role of principal leadership (Bush, 2007; Leithwood, et al., 2004). Although the participatory management style (Adu, 2016), which entails support from the education authorities, was absent in Wedad's account, she could rely on herself to maintain progress towards meeting her school's ongoing needs. Offering support to colleagues and students under difficult circumstances indicates that, in line with this management style, Wedad foregrounded the key managerial attributes of flexibility and acuity in taking decisions.

Despite this, some of the participants' reliance on family support indicates that their power as principals was not adequate to respond effectively to the challenges of the role. Participants pointed out that they frequently relied on others' power to deal with challenges, particularly those connected to culture and gender norms. Support from the male members of their families was perceived as a strategic response to the difficulties that the participants faced in dealing with male educational officials and other male workers. Sometimes, they employed this technique when they felt that their power was simply insufficient to achieve their objectives. Hanan, for instance, stated that: 'honestly, my husband is the first one who keeps encouraging me on my administrative work'. Her remark suggests that most participants felt that this support positively influenced their leadership. The participants in this study have many similarities to other women leaders worldwide in receiving support from their family members

which help them to overcome their career challenges (Hansen, 2014; Loder, 2005; Moorosi, 2010; Murakami and Törnsen, 2017; Parker, 2015).

7.5.4 Personal Characteristics and Merits

Participants believed that they had special characteristics and competencies that facilitated their leadership careers. These personal merits assisted them in responding to the challenges they faced. For example, Sarah stated that 'Leadership cannot be taught, it is a talent', a statement that accords with recent evidence that some individuals may indeed be 'born leaders' (Northouse, 2018). She concluded, as mentioned in chapter five: 'It is strength and insistence, nothing else'. Modi similarly pointed to the family support she received from her father. She reported several personal traits that were materially useful in her role, saying: 'I think that I had all the skills that can facilitate administrative work, such as calmness, having a perspective of the future, and self-initiative'. Similar to Modi, Ebtsam, who also received support from her father from her childhood, said: 'I have dared to dream since I was a child: I love innovation and hate engaging in routine work'. This encouraged her to establish a sports hall and initiate extracurricular activities in her school. Reem believed that her patience and wisdom enabled her to be successful in her management work, as her personal characteristics helped her to understand others and communicate well with them. To this she added an expressed belief in her perspicacity, saying: 'I made notable progress in my school despite poor conditions'.

Hanan expressed the belief that the experiences she gained from the difficult circumstances of her childhood and from traveling around the world had ultimately proved

beneficial, and she felt that her personality had improved through contact with different cultures. She believed that these experiences facilitated her leadership, stating: 'exploring foreign cultures taught me to be calm and understand people from different backgrounds'. Thus, it appears that participants in this study tended to use their personal characteristics and merits reactively, combining these with their experience to respond to challenges they faced. In this, it appears that they facilitated the management of their schools and decision making in response to crises rather than leading change in their schools through setting wider strategic goals for development (Alsufyan, 2002).

7.6 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has set out to explore the experiences of female head teachers in order to understand their views about being in a headship position. It shed light on their satisfaction within their roles, the challenges they encountered within their social and cultural context, the facilities available to them, and examined the influence of the aforementioned issues on the participants' approaches to leadership.

Most participants reported that it was not difficult for them to obtain the position of principal. This assertion was largely justified by the vast amount of vacancies available in girls' school where male teachers were not allowed to work, but the stressful and difficult nature of their posts clearly contributed to the limited competition for them. These challenges were rooted in a gender-segregated educational system derived from cultural norms, whose centralised management and unwillingness to build meaningful

relationships with female principals facilitated this shortfall in applicants. This supports the view that head teachers' behaviour and perspectives are grounded in societal culture, where values differ from culture to culture and from society to society.

While the participants believed that the principal should have the greatest central role in all school decisions and management, they were dissatisfied with the power and authority given to them from the MoE. Female head teachers felt that being able to take part in recruiting teachers would improve school management and decision making, which would make individual schools more able to work towards strategic goals.

Various challenges emerged from the participants' stories as seen through the lens of cultural role of women. It is readily apparent from the participants' narratives that, in Saudi culture, engaging women in a headship position was fraught with difficulties. The centralised educational system restricted the participants' abilities to take their own decisions as they had to wait for approval from the MoE, even for relatively trivial matters relating to maintenance. The communication processes between the head teachers and the MoE's employees was similarly made vastly more difficult by gender segregation. As a result of gender stereotypes, some participants felt that their voices consistently went unheard by the male workers in the MoE. This resulted in delays in the execution of school business, and placed restrictions on management and decision-making processes. In addition, the difficulties of working with unqualified female educational supervisors hindered participants' abilities to lead their schools.

A chronic shortage of ongoing training and professional development was also reported by the head teachers. Despite these prevailing challenges, the participants were

keenly aware that their performances would be assessed and accounted for, which contributed to hesitation in making decision. In light of this accountability, they expressed particular concern with regards to financial management. Creating a balance between home duties and school responsibilities was a further challenge reported.

However, several factors were also crucial in helping participants to cope with these perceived challenges. Long periods of experience in their posts greatly improved head teachers' leadership roles as their skills developed over time. While some participants employed their social networks and *wasta* to circumvent the barriers between themselves and MoE personnel, and discharge their schools' business in a timely manner, others received more direct and less nepotistic support from their families.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises and discusses the main findings of the study presented in chapter five to seven with reference to the research objectives. It commences with an overview of the research process, followed by a discussion of the key findings from the research. These key findings are discussed with respect to the research questions in order to highlight the achievement of the research aim. Further, these findings are compared to prior studies, reviewed in chapter 2 and 3, in order to identify the contributions of this thesis. These findings represent crucial conclusions drawn from the life histories of my participants, from their childhood to their current professional positions, and accordingly were presented in a chronological order in chapters five to seven. Based on the research findings, the implications for practice and the thesis' contribution to knowledge is then outlined. Further, the limitations of the present research are discussed, and recommendations for future research presented.

8.2 Overview of the research process

This study sought to explore the life histories of women head teachers in girls' secondary schools in the KSA, investigating their individual journeys to headship positions and their experiences from their careers. Therefore, my study considers the life journeys to the leadership position (headship) and then the experiences in the leadership roles. My research, in exploring the life journeys and leadership experiences, sought to answer three research questions:

RQ1. How did the early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female head teachers' journeys towards leadership?

RQ2. In what way does the social construction of the participant's gender have an impact on their journeys towards and experiences of leadership?

RQ3. What are the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they faced in their journeys towards leadership in their respective schools?'

In order to answer the above research questions, a qualitative research design was employed, using a life history method. The theoretical lens of social constructionism was applied to this study. This enabled me to highlight how the social construct of gender affected the female head teachers' life journeys and leadership experiences. This theoretical perspective is relevant to my study as it posits that the human characteristics (such as gender, ability and race) thought to be immutable and solely biological, are actually products of human definition and interpretation, shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Burr, 2015; Schwandt, 2000). Thus, gender, from this theoretical lens is socially constructed and is often used to organize 'human social life in culturally patterned ways' (Lorber, 1994, p. 6). Gender has been used to organise social relations in everyday life as well as in major social structures (Blackmore, 2017; Hoskins, 2010; Szell and Thurner, 2013).

In utilizing a life history approach, my study highlights how the socially agreed gender category (female) affected the life journeys and leadership experiences of my participants. As social constructionism theory posits, once assigned a gender category from

childhood, individuals in one category are treated differently, and as a result also behave differently in response to the differential treatment. The life history approach was considered appropriate to address the research objectives based on the underlying philosophical assumptions of social constructionism (see chapter four). In particular, the life history approach provides a much wide context (personal, historical, social, institutional and political) to situate participants' lives (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Hatch and Wisniewski, 2002; Hoskins, 2012).

In employing a life history method, twelve female principals from different girls' schools in a single city of Saudi Arabia took part in semi-structured interviews, which were carried out in two phases of data collection. After a thematic analysis of the data, three overarching main themes emerged that connected participants' experiences: early childhood experiences and schooling, university life and early career experiences, and headship experiences. These overlapping phases reflect the complexity of being a female head teacher in Saudi Arabia. However, as social constructionism posits, the life histories of my participants are, arguably, socially constructed. Thus, the Saudi social structures, including cultural norms and gender roles have had a lasting impact on the participants' identities and performances. In particular, my study shows that there are some deep engraved social cultural norms that affected the life journeys (such as home upbringing, type of education, career choices, social position and choices) and leadership experiences (such as career choices, leadership styles, challenges). In general, my participants experienced gender inequality in their upbringings and within the education system, from their early childhood and schooling experiences onwards.

The next section discusses the key findings. The key findings are discussed with respect to how they answer the research questions. In this regard, the first research question, 'how did early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female head teachers' journeys towards leadership?' is addressed first in sections 8.3.1 while the third research question, 'what are the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they face in their journeys towards leadership in respective schools?' is linked with the discussion of the key findings in section 8.3.3. Further, the second research question 'in what way did the social construction of the participant's gender impact upon their journeys and experiences of leadership?' as it applies to both the life journeys and leadership experience cuts across the key findings. In this regard, the second research question is addressed in the key findings across all three sections (8.3.1, 8.3.2 and 8.3.3).

8.3 Key Findings

This section presents the key findings of the study and how they answer the research questions.

8.3.1 RQ1: How did the early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female head teachers' journeys towards leadership?

The findings of early childhood experiences and schooling (see chapter five) have addressed research question one, 'how did the early childhood and schooling experiences influence Saudi female head teachers' journeys towards leadership?' and with respect to that phase in the participants' lives, research question two 'in what way does the

social construction of the participant's gender have an impact on their journeys and experiences of leadership'.

Data analysis showed that the social construction of my participants' gender was a key influencer of their professional roles through all their journeys to their leadership positions. This can be seen through their life history, from their childhood through to their appointment as head teachers and beyond, including their experiences at secondary school and university. Although my participants came from relatively similar social-cultural settings, data showed that their early childhood played an important role in their career and reflected in the way that they responded to the challenges they faced as head teachers. Thus, these childhood experiences reflect the genesis of the participants' gendered roles in the Saudi society (Acker, 1992; Coates, 1998) and was useful to understanding the encouragement, scepticism, support and sufferings (Alvesson and Billing, 2009) of the participants. Early experiences, for instance, play a crucial role in assisting children in pursuing career options and alternatives (Demirtaş and Sucuoğlu, 2009) and this was evident in my study as understanding the early childhood experiences of my participants was a vital factor in understanding their journeys to leadership roles. This has also been shown in prior studies (e.g. Nivala and Hujala, 2002; Osgood, 2004). However, the female head teachers' stories showed considerable differences in experiences within a relatively similar socio-cultural setting, where their childhood experiences varied according to their family circumstances including child birth order, family support, and parents' education and careers. Nonetheless, their life histories revealed that individual childhood experiences contributed to their development of leadership roles.

It is crucial to note that this early experience cannot be separated from the local culture, where cultural perspectives played a significant role. My participants expressed a variety of views on their childhood, where some of them experienced very difficult circumstances. Hanan and Sarah, the eldest in their families, for example, both lost their fathers while they were children and, according to Saudi Arabia culture Hanan had to take on substantial responsibilities from an early age as the eldest child in the family. My data indicates that these experiences were a strong incentive for them to pursue leadership roles which largely supports Moorosi's (2010) study that showed a positive influence of difficult childhood experiences on the character and leadership aspiration. Other studies have also highlighted similar effects (e.g. Bennis and Thomas, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2003; Shamir and Eilam, 2005).

However, positive experiences also appeared to be indirectly related to perceptions of women's roles in Saudi society. Where the cultural perception of gender had a significant impact on the construction of the participants' roles in their lives, there are other factors that have assisted them in challenging this construction. While some participants grew up in very conservative families, others did not adhere to their local cultural norms as strongly, whilst others, as in a case of Hanan and Sarah, experienced unpleasant events, and others were the first born in their families, as in the case of Hanan and Hasna. Additionally, some participants were supported by the high levels of educational attainment and career progression within their families, which mainly draws upon social and cultural influences (Coleman, 2001). Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann (2009) also support this finding in arguing that higher levels of parental education led to higher levels of educational aspirations.

Data showed a number of overlapping factors that have played an active role in shaping participants' personalities and underpinned their sense of responsibility and leadership, especially on the occasions when participants faced gender inequality. Few participants perceived their early childhood as inconsequential in terms of its influence in developing their characteristics and abilities. This is especially true among the participants whose families were uneducated and strictly adherent to their social norms in which changing the engraved dominant social understanding on gender roles would have been resisted the most (Luckmann, 2013). Thus, this is inconsistent with Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann (2009) findings regarding the influence of the level of parental education on children's career aspirations but consistent with Al-Lamky (2007) findings in the case of Omani women who showed a strong desire to break away from the predominant social norm of female subordination starting from childhood experiences.

Whilst a small number of the head teachers participating in this study regarded primary and secondary school experiences as having a vital role in shaping their personalities and their ability to lead and make their own decisions, the majority felt that their leadership journeys had not been influenced by this period. From most participants' perspectives, their school atmosphere appeared restrictive and lacking in wider extracurricular activities, with its main concern lying with students' academic achievement rather than developing key life skills for students, such as leadership. This is contrary to other studies (e.g. Cubillo and Brown, 2003; Lavery and Hine, 2013; Madsen, 2007a, McNae, 2011) that argue that primary and secondary school experiences play a critical role in influencing personal qualities and the development of leadership skills.

8.3.2 RQ2: In what way does the social construction of the participant's gender have an impact on their journeys towards and experiences of leadership?

As stated earlier, the social construction of participants' gender, had affected all the stages of the participants' life. As was observable at the early childhood and schooling level, this aspect also continued to impact on participants' university life and early career experiences (see chapter six).

Female head teachers were fortunate insofar as they had free higher education and easy access to university education, but their decisions regarding the choice of course of study were influenced by their cultural norms and gender roles. Participants' experiences reflected wider social inequalities in selecting a university major; the availability of university programmes was contingent on gendered cultural expectations of women's education and work. This suggests that the gendered cultural perspectives of the older generations of Saudi society were crucial in influencing their choice of major at university, as the social view remains that the goal of their education was to prepare them to be successful wives and mothers. Thus, this reflects the deep rooted socio-cultural expectations that certain types of educations, careers choices, work and social positions are more connected with a certain gender (Binns, 2010; Mavin and Grandy, 2012). Further, a secondary object of this education was also to prepare them for jobs that matched gendered constructions of their nature, like teaching, a provision that ensured their working in a caring and segregated environment (Alamro, 2012; Hamdan, 2005; Porter and Umbach, 2006). It seems that this understanding of women's education and work was rarely challenged by the participants, mainly due to the inherent limitations of their cultural perspectives. Thus, this study agrees with the

argument that the internalisation of gendered norms and gender discourses which encourage some women to position themselves as valuing certain feminine characteristics (Hoskins and Smedley, 2016; Smulyan, 2004) contributes to the persistence of feminine career choices. Teaching, as a career choice, based on its nature (caring, shaping and nurturing) seemed to have less societal resistance.

In addition, my analysis showed that participants' conformity to social norms or customs meant that some got married while they were university students. Conformity to such social norms, as Weick (1995, p. 31) argues, can contribute to the 'materials that become the constraints and opportunities' for women's advancement. In the case of my participants, it is highly likely to have impacted upon their development towards maturity by placing additional responsibilities on the women's shoulders. Consequently, opportunities for independence and effective leadership abilities were reduced from what might be expected of unmarried women or those not responsible for the care of young or dependent family members. The common expectation to get married at a particular age can be perceived as a 'product' of culture and history which is 'dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that particular culture at that time' (Burr, 2015, p. 4).

Most head teachers felt that their university life played at best a passive role in forming their personalities and their leadership abilities. This was underlined by the limited opportunities offered them for personal development in the absence of training programmes and the specific lack of opportunities for preparing to become head teachers (Hernandez and Roberts, 2012; Hess and Kelly, 2007). The participants experienced gender inequality in terms of the extracurricular activities available to them both inside

and even outside the university. Thus, similar to Kinzie et al. (2007) findings, limited university activities were offered for females in comparison with their male counterparts, reflecting the gendered relations and patterns of society which are engraved in the educational settings (Archer and Lloyds, 2002).

By contrast, some head teachers recalled several examples of engagement in volunteer or non-academic activities, such as participating in helping new students or taking care of a place of prayer. This can be linked to cultural perspectives, where engaging in activities acceptable to the society is considered substantially more favourable to participating in activities that might reflect on their future career. In this respect, there is some privileging of relevance of different activities from society's perspective (Burr, 2015; Parker, 1998) such as social roles over academic activities. Furthermore, some head teachers believed that their personalities were improved by meeting and interacting with new students from different areas of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. However, the participants' stories suggest that they held a narrow understanding of university life: their time at university was a largely academic experience, with limited extracurricular activities and opportunities to develop other than in a strictly academic sense. In a highly gendered society, this is expected given that women have to demonstrate exceptional academic achievement (Young Shin and Bang, 2013; Eagly, 2007) in order to overcome societal barriers (Fuller and Harford, 2016). As such, my participants' interests were focused on good academic achievement so as to open up future employment opportunities for themselves, to the exclusion of other personal development.

When the participants graduated from their universities, their qualifications enabled them to work in the teaching profession. This was largely due to the total gender segregation of the KSA education system, whose principles were reinforced by cultural constructions of women's roles in employment. Being a teacher matched the social construction of participants' gender roles as caring and nurturing: most head teachers perceived their teaching experiences as enjoyable as they could offer care, support, and help to their students which is consistent with wider literature that show education as a feminine field (Hutchings et al., 2012; Hoskins, 2010; Mercer, 2013). Furthermore, the head teachers participating in this study also took part in a wide range of school activities, particularly management tasks, which contributed to their development of leadership skills.

8.3.3 RQ3: What are the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they faced in their journeys towards leadership in their respective schools?

Analysis of the collected data indicated that the head teachers faced several challenges in their journeys towards leadership roles. However, participants were also strongly influenced by these challenges while practicing their roles and, as such, they can be seen as an integral part of their leadership journeys. This is particularly the case given that the social construct of gender affects the entire life of individuals (Lorber, 2010; Subramaniam 2014). These challenges have reflected negatively on their role in their schools, but they were also positively influenced by key factors in their environment. Participants felt that their paths to their respective headship positions were easy and

presented no challenges, the fact of their gender in such a segregated educational system and widespread employment opportunities facilitating their access to school leadership positions. Thus, contrary to some research (e.g. Young Shin and Bang, 2013; Eagly, 2007) that found that women have to possess more qualifications than men to be acceptable as leaders, this is not applicable in the educational setting of Saudi Arabia which is gender segregated. The widespread employment opportunities can also be attributed to prevailing KSA policy, which concentrates power in the hands of the MoE rather than giving this power to schools' head teachers. The lack of authority and power allocated to school leadership positions have also been highlighted in other studies (Alharbi, 2014; Alzaidi, 2008; Alsharari, 2010; Saiti and Eliophotou-Menon, 2009; Taj, 2016).

The head teachers' narratives also suggested that some participants hesitated to apply for or accept headship positions. This was strongly influenced by participants' awareness of social gender norms, wherein they perceived that the responsibilities and duties inherent in such positions strongly favoured masculine, rather than feminine, gender roles. This indirectly propagates the promotion of masculine characteristics and the downplaying of feminine characteristics highlighted in Irvine and Vermilya (2010) study. This perception also reflects the socio-cultural interpretation that male counterparts are better leaders (Al-Hussein, 2011; Al-Joulani, 1993; Arar and Abramovitz, 2013). Further, some participants were aware that being appointed to this position would increase their responsibilities, giving rise to potential conflict with their perceived responsibilities at home. This awareness was rooted in a number of key factors, including the social construction of gender roles and the innate cultural pressures on women to invest time and effort in their home lives over their careers. This is consistent

with other studies (e.g. Alamro, 2012; Alwedinani, 2016; Hamdan, 2005) that show that the fundamental role of Saudi women was maintaining their home, and thus any potential conflict with this gendered role would be avoided. This is also observed in the cases where some of the head teachers had to obtain permission from their husbands before accepting the headship role. In other cases, the head teachers had to act differently at home, 'covering their leadership qualities' as the social norms give the final say to men. This social construct of a gendered role has been highlighted in literature as a hindrance to leadership progression (Eagly, 2007; Northouse, 2018; Watts, 2009).

Although the head teachers perceived their involvement in schools' leadership and decision making as highly important, they expressed dissatisfaction with the power and authority given to them to help them fulfil their role. While the supervisory authorities placed over them were perceived by a few school head teachers as suited to the task, others believed the retention of power and authority at a level removed from the context of the school itself was an unnecessary restriction on their leadership. As such, some headteachers expressive desire for increased diffusion of power and authority at the school levels. However, in seeking for more power or authority diffusion, consideration of what constitutes an appropriate level of power needs to be taken into account as some participants also highlighted the potential dysfunctional effects of increased power to head teachers.

Arguably, the MoE intentionally reinforces limited power and authority of school headship roles by reducing the leadership roles of head teachers, encouraging them to more strictly follow its regulations and execute the instructions and goals formulated

by the ministry. This power hierarchy could, therefore, be perceived as appropriate to support the managerial leadership style (see section 3.3.3) that aligns with a centralized educational system (Alzaidi, 2008; Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993; Mathis, 2010; Ostrosky, 2015).

The head teachers participating in this study also experienced substantial challenges that hindered their performance in leading their schools. For example, Laila expressed a fear of accountability rooted in her lack of training for the role, while Wedad's attempts to instigate change in her school were frustrated by the slow response to her school's issues from the male officials at the MOE. However, the specifics of these challenges varied significantly among the participants and were influenced by both their cultural beliefs regarding their role and by their personal characteristics. Nonetheless, these individual challenges overlapped with other systemic challenges, including the top-down policy of the educational system applied by the MoE, relationships with female educational supervisors, difficulties in communicating with the MoE, handling financial issues, fear of accountability, lack of headship training, and dual responsibilities. These aspects could be perceived as the invisible promotion of gender ideologies (Bassi et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016) through the sustenance of current imbalances/inequalities.

It is crucial to note here that there were no signs that the head teachers challenged the policy of the MoE, not least as this would be very difficult for them given the power imbalances between (female) school principals and the male-dominated Ministry. Rather, the head teachers were committed to coping with policies they were not satisfied with. From a social constructionist perspective, the lack of challenge or voice raised

essentially reinforces the status quo as both the invisible and visible moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideologies get sustained (Lorber, 1994; Foucault, 1972; Gramsci, 1971). The participating head teachers used varied strategies to this end, and these strategies were clearly of material assistance in helping participants to continue advancing in their roles. With these coping strategies that do not challenge the status quo, the head teachers are in effect accepting the status quo as natural or given, with less room to challenge the course of thinking (Lorber, 2010). These strategies generally focused around leveraging positive influencers on their leadership, including accumulated professional experiences, extended social relationship networks, support given by family members, and personal characteristics and competencies. These coping strategies have been highlighted in other studies too (Jean-Marie, 2013; Mathis, 2010; Reed, 2012; Rehal, 2015). All participants benefited from at least one of these positive influencers. For example, while some of them used their extended social networks to apply pressure on the MoE, other participants obtained the help of their male family members to assist them in circumventing communication barriers with the Ministry. Furthermore, women head teachers perceived that their professional duties and leadership roles would be impossible to discharge without these influencers.

Further, with respect to the perception of what leadership entails, most head teachers perceived their role as ‘driver’ of the schools with emphasis built around leadership characteristics of ‘influence’ and ‘vision’ (Bush, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Mathews and Crow, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2007). Thus, leadership is less perceived as a relationship or motivation by most participants. However, leadership seems to be perceived more of a practice than a process (Handy, 2012; Kotter, 1999; Richards and Engle, 1986; Schermerhorn, 1999) which implies following MoE policies to the letter.

In addition, the participants' leadership styles were mostly managerial which attunes to both the bureaucratic and hierarchical structures typical of educational settings (Bush, 2007; Powell and Tahan, 2018). The transformation leadership style, whilst perceived as desirable and most appropriate to female leadership in the literature (Bass et al., 1996; Brinia, 2012; Eagly et al., 2003; Rosener, 1990; Taki, 2006) is highly impractical in the case of Saudi Arabia. Transactional leadership style, due to lack of reward power, is also not absent.

This section addressed the third research questions and showed the whole picture of the highly impact of the social constructionism of participants' gender on their professional life.

8.4 Contribution to knowledge

This qualitative study on the leadership journeys and experiences of female head teachers makes a contribution to an under-researched area in Saudi Arabia. The research has examined the leadership journeys of female head teachers, focusing closely on the key issues arising from the local cultural perspectives and the life histories of participants.

The research has contributed new knowledge through allowing the voice of female head teachers from KSA to be heard clearly. The data sheds light on the life journeys of head teachers and draws attention to key areas of research that have hitherto never been discussed or raised. In addition, this research suggests that the application of a centralised education system in Saudi Arabia (Alzaidi, 2008; Rugh, 2002), though a

key factor, cannot be the main reason for poor leadership and involvement in decision making by the women head teachers. As such, this study contributes in showing that there is need to go beyond the administrative/organisational structures of the education system in order to better understand the factors that contribute to poor leadership and decision making. As Bush (2007) for instance argues, a centralised education system is appropriate in many contexts as it enables the efficient implementation of external requirements from higher levels in order to meet educational quality standards. Therefore, the centralised education system could have its shortcomings, but still remains largely appropriate to the educational institutions/system where aspects such as education quality need to be monitored and benchmarked at a national level (Cullen et al., 2003; Somerset, 2011). As a result, a change to decentralisation and more autonomy for schools could come at a potential trade off whilst the underlying factors affecting leadership or decision making remaining unchanged.

However, this research's investigation of the early life experiences of head teachers, and their reflections on their life journeys towards leadership roles, has shed new light on the tension between head teachers and the MoE. For instance, MoE is perceived as not adequately addressing the needs of the girls' secondary schools such as headship training. The use of a life history approach has shown that the poor communication between the two parties can be, in part, attributed to cultural differences. It should nonetheless, be noted that although the General Presidency for Girls' Education has become part of the MoE and some important roles have been allocated to women after years of being under the control of other departments (Hamdan, 2005), a predominantly male cohort of officials remain in control. From a social constructionist perspective, change is possible as the social world can be deconstructed and reconstructed

(Burr, 2015; Luckmann, 2013), however, this process in the case of Saudi Arabia will inevitably take a long time as the dominant understandings of the role of women in society are intricately engraved into the social arrangements. Thus, resistance to change would be conceived as both visible and invisible (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Burr, 2015).

The theoretical contribution, therefore, lies in the utilisation of the social constructionism theory to a non-western context to help identify both the visible and invisible aspects that affect social structures. Importantly, the study contributes in advancing that any meaningful national school reforms (e.g. reforms aimed at female education empowerment) should take into account both the visible and invisible forces/aspects that sustain the existing social structure or reinforce the status quo (Bassi et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016) for change to be effective. Different countries (e.g. Poland, Vietnam, Pakistan, Mexico, Papua New Guinea) have been undertaking school reforms (World Bank, 2017) with a few successes.

Further, the gendered norms and constructions, as studied through the theoretical lens of social constructionism, played an important role in shaping head teachers' perspectives of their role in schools. My research findings go beyond the discussions in the western literature to reveal that, for women in school leadership in the KSA, obedience to spouses and being exemplary in discharging domestic responsibilities, as well as adherence to social norms and responding to challenges in ways that take social customs into account, are all more important than pure professionalism. As such, this study also makes a contribution to the literature on education professionalism

(Densmore, 2018; Furlong et al., 2000; Green, 2011; Ozga and Lawn, 2017) particularly in showing some challenges that exist when advancing professionalism in different country contexts. These aspects might highlight some uniqueness of the Saudi Arabian context as these social customs have been retrojected into consciousness and seen as a normal way of life (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Le Cornu, 2009; McLeod, 1997). However, other social-cultural factors might be applicable in other countries which need to be taken into account when promoting educational professionalism.

In addition, the study revealed that participants, such as Modi, Ebtsam, Wedad and Hanan, who sought to prove themselves as head teachers were neither psychologically ready nor, in practice, able to challenge the bureaucratic regulations of the MoE. This lack of readiness can at least partly be attributed to the local cultural perspectives, with their inability to effectively challenge the MoE more directly attributabed to deep-rooted gendered norms and constructions rather than the centralised system itself. These deep-rooted gendered societal norms, thus, become indirectly visible through the structure and operations of public institutions (Lorber, 1994; 2010). In this respect, the study also makes a contribution to the literature that argue that organisations/institutions are highly influenced by external factors (such as culture) which are then reflected in organisational management styles and operations (Bhaskaran and Sukumaran, 2007; Cappelli and Sherer, 1991; Van Muijen and Koopman, 1994).

Further, this research highlights the ongoing need to embrace and appreciate the importance of context (Bryman et al., 1996; Simkins, 2005) in the application of educational and leadership theory. Specifically, this study contributes by showing that a generalised adoption of western leadership theories in the context of Saudi Arabia does

not necessarily hold. The study highlights that some widely-accepted western leadership styles and gender-specific approaches to leadership are of diminished relevance in the context of Saudi Arabia. For instance, whilst some studies (Bass et al., 1996; Brinia, 2012; Eagly et al., 2003; Rosener, 1990; Taki, 2006) have perceived a strong link between female leadership and transformational leadership, this relationship is absent in a Saudi context due to the engraved gendered norms that have permeated the centralized education system which gives less power and authority to female head teachers. Thus, this study highlights the need to go beyond a dogmatic and over-generalised application of western theories to educational leadership, and instead develop and re-think the existing theories in ways that engage with the particularity and difference of countries where western social norms fail to hold.

Therefore, this study's findings contribute in aiding a shift in the focus of ongoing research into women's education, in this case by shifting the focus which has been dominantly Eurocentric (or Anglocentric) in giving the context of KSA. This shift in focus should reflect not only the immediate challenges faced by women aspiring to educational leadership, but also an understanding of the environmental circumstances, including cultural perceptions, which hinder head teachers from developing towards fully effective leaders in their respective schools.

Further, besides the theoretical contribution of this research in advancing the application of social constructionism theory in non-western settings, the study also makes a methodological contribution in its utilisation of the life history approach. In particular, the study contributes in showing that life history approach could be used in researching unique experiences of female leaders (head teachers in this study) in conservative

(non-western) societies. As such, this study contributes in supporting the usefulness of the life history method as highlighted by other researchers (Bird and Ojermark, 2011; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Hoskins, 2012; Middleton, 1993).

8.5 Implications for policy and practice

The findings in this research have implications for both policy and practice. The study has identified that there is a significant gap between policy and practice in the field of female educational leadership in the KSA. Importantly, this research's findings have implications for policy and practice in different aspects.

Firstly, as leadership practice in KSA is currently perceived as a primarily masculine sphere of action, substantial support efforts are needed to help build and sustain effective female leadership roles and practices. As such, this study urges policy makers in the field of education to consider reducing the dominant masculine stereotypes associated with leadership positions and practice. This could be done through building awareness starting at the grassroot level and also incorporating these aspects within the educational curriculum. For instance, where pupils (students) starting from primary school are taught that leadership/success has no gender orientation. Understandably, the process of change takes time and therefore, what this study advocates is taking small steps towards positive change. As such, the practices of women being seen as predominantly domestic workers need to be challenged and changed. Importantly, with a positive will on the part of policy makers, more voice should be given to women in different settings for more empowerment to occur (Metcalfe, 2008) with education playing a key role in this process (British Council, 2017; World Bank 2014). Given

the female head teachers' early childhood experiences in this study, it is evident that more support and awareness is needed for girls' education in the wider KSA society.

Secondly, arising from the life journeys of the female head teachers, particularly in their university life and early career periods, the implication is that there is need for trainee leadership programmes that help identify and develop female leaders. Developing leadership skills is a process (Bass, 1985) and therefore, leadership skills building programmes could be developed and implemented at an early stage (during university/college stage and early career phases). Interestingly, there have been several worldwide female leadership programmes for school-age children and students who demonstrate an aptitude for leadership in schools and colleges (such as the UN's Women political empowerment and leadership programme (UNWomen, 2019) which can be beneficial to countries, Saudi Arabia, included. Thus, promoting such programmes or implementing similar programmes that take into account the local context could form a strong start to female leadership journeys, enabling them to become future (educational) leaders to Saudi Arabian (educational) institutions.

Arising from the leadership experiences of some head teachers in this study, there is need for policies aimed at assessing leadership competencies to school positions. Particularly, there should be appropriate methods of assessing the personal and vocational competencies of candidates who apply for KSA school headship positions. Thus, those who meet the school headship position requirements should be appointed to these positions and where a shortfall in meeting requirements is observed, appropriate support should be provided to counter the inadequacy. This implies that identification of leadership skills gap is made right at the headship appointment stage for each school.

Further, given the observed inadequacies of leadership training, policy implications could include conducting regular, high-quality training courses for principals who are in the headship positions. The professional in-service training and professional development should be an important part of school principal preparation programs. In addition, as the study has highlighted that the lack of autonomy makes leadership at school level a challenge, policy changes could be directed at giving an appropriate degree of autonomy to individual school head teachers to make important decisions, empowering them to make differences in their school's material circumstances and improve students' performance. This autonomy should be guided and supported by the MoE. In proposing a degree of autonomy (and thus, more power), acknowledgement is made to the possible dysfunctional effects that could arise from increased power at school levels (see section 3.4). As such, what is proposed here is an appropriate level of power which fosters positive changes at school levels and minimises the dysfunctional effects that could be associated with such power.

At the school levels, another implication to practice for female head teachers is the need for effective communication and engagement of head teachers with their subordinates. More team engagements and communication would help build some solidarity towards positive change and a friendlier working environment. This is important particularly that some societal pressures and demands on working females are not restricted to headship positions but to everyone. Thus, more interaction and engagement would be important in creating a positive school climate that contributes to institutional performance and success (Cohen et al., 2008; Thapa et al., 2013; Tubbs and Garner, 2008; Stover, 2005).

Further, with increased communication and engagement of head teachers and their subordinates, there could be more delegation of responsibilities to subordinates. The delegation of responsibilities would not only reduce the work pressure on the female head teachers but would also give opportunities to develop leadership skills and aspirations to leadership among subordinates (junior staff). This becomes one way in which the female head teachers can directly provide support from their experiences to others within their schools.

Also, given some similar experiences observed among female head teachers, it would be encouraged for female head teachers to network more with their peers. As such, a network of female head teachers could be established which can help provide support through the sharing of experiences, for instance, on what worked or didn't work in given circumstances. With such as network, it becomes easier to have some peer-to-peer observations and reviews (with the MoE support if necessary). A peer-to-peer review could form an important aspect in benchmarking head teacher performance in order to identify areas for support and change.

In addition, as the study has found that lack of support to leadership positions from the MoE presents a leadership challenge, policies that directly aim at equipping female school principals to leadership roles could be developed. These could include the provision of compulsory leadership training, and to develop accreditation and standards for those taking up leadership posts. This accreditation and standards would provide a means to monitor professional competence development. Within the remit of the Ministry of Higher Education, this study provides further empirical evidence to support

policy changes regarding the establishment of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Educational Leadership, and in supporting discipline of School Administration, particularly for female candidates. The data gathered here may also build toward a more complete picture of the leadership roles occupied by the principals of girls' schools in Saudi Arabia. This remains the first and most crucial step in implementing reforms that will build towards an educational system which can afford female KSA citizens real opportunities to compete in global skills and labour markets.

Further, this study's findings have implications for leaders and planners in the education sector in Saudi Arabia who have recently embarked on a nationwide educational reform process to understand the roles female head teachers can play. These roles are integral not only in the change management process, but also in the new educational system being introduced through the reform programmes in Saudi Arabia. The change management process could follow, for instance, the following steps:

Firstly, the process of change should begin by reviewing the status quo, with both current head teachers and those who are in preparation participating in this process. It is hoped that the findings of this study will shed light on an optimal appointment process during the period of transformation. Such appointments should be linked to the preparation of head teachers in which early experience and support is explored.

Secondly, in order for the reforms to be truly transformative, head teachers, including those in preparation, should be actively encouraged to share their own experiences,

views and perspectives so that everyone may learn from their experiences. The creation of appropriately collegiate fora for head teachers to conduct this process of experience, knowledge and skills sharing should be a priority for KSA policy-makers.

Thirdly, it should be acknowledged that the change in schools must be driven by leaders (head teachers) with appropriate authority to meet the challenges of leadership. Head teachers should be given the ability to make local decisions and use strategies applicable for the unique circumstances of their specific school, rather than being required to work purely to the requirements of a bureaucratic and centralised system. Such strategies need to be based on the experiences of head teachers from the field.

8.6 Research limitations

This research has some limitations which might impact on the applicability of the findings to other contexts, despite every effort made to make the study solid and relevant. Firstly, as in most qualitative research, the number of participants is relatively small. Although this limitation is widely acknowledged by qualitative researchers, my findings can nonetheless be applied more widely in respect to the challenges and enhancers of female leadership in another context. An understanding, nonetheless, of the sociocultural and historical context of any case for application is relevant. Secondly, none of the participants in this study were employed in the KSA's private education sector. Leadership roles and decision making within this sector is expected to differ substantially from that in the public sector. Head teachers in private schools in KSA, including international schools, have different educational systems and exercise autonomy in

most school issues. Therefore, their principle experiences of leadership and management are expected to be different from those employed in public schools.

Thirdly, parts of the life history approach concerned participants' early childhood times, which in some cases was multiple decades in the past. The time elapsed between the interviews and these experiences might have affected the accuracy of head teachers' accounts of their early education experiences. However, the methodological approach was aimed at capturing the authentic representations of their life stories, hence consideration was given to aspects such as politics of representations (see section 4.11.1). Despite the considerations, these aspects can never be completely eliminated. Fifthly, as I was a lone researcher and responsible for all data collection and analysis, the research process may have been impacted upon by my own personal experiences, intentions, and values. This is also implicated in the sampling approach adopted. In particular, there was a selection bias in using the purposive sampling approach which could have affected the responses from the participants. Further, all the participants in the study were from one city in KSA which could have an effect on perceptions as well as experiences. The effects of such issues are difficult to identify and separate from the study. In addition, because of purposive sampling, some voices (which could be critical) might have not been captured by the researcher. Similarly, the voices of other parties and stakeholders mentioned by participants, especially the MoE, were absent as the focus is on the participants only.

Further, whilst a life history approach was deemed suitable for attaining the research objectives, other research methods could have provided an even much richer understanding of the experiences of head teachers. For instance, ethnographic research could

have been conducted providing real-life experiences through observations, but such an approach is constrained by time.

8.7 Further research

Based on research findings and limitations, this research highlights important areas to be investigated by future research, as this study examined the life histories of head teachers who work in girls' secondary schools, future research could explore the perspectives of the male head teachers in boys' schools to understand the challenges that they encounter in their roles and how they deal with these challenges.

Secondly, similar studies might be conducted in different locations or cities within Saudi Arabia to explore the similarities and differences between the specific local contexts. This would help highlight whether locality has an influence on the leadership experiences with the country. Thirdly, as this research focused only on female head teachers, collecting data concerning headship provision from KSA officials and education policy makers would allow for comparison between different views. Thus, different viewpoints would enhance a rich understanding through revealing complementary or contradictory perspectives.

Fourthly, further research could investigate the journeys of female head teachers' path to leadership positions and their experiences of leadership in private schools. This could offer a valuable comparison in the headship provision between public and private sector in KSA.

This study also highlighted some challenges that affect female head teachers' professionalism. As such, further research could be conducted to investigate the professionalism phenomenon in the schools. This could include understanding different teachers' perceptions of it, how it is enhanced and the difficulties in maintaining it, given the socio, political and cultural context of KSA.

8.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has set out to ensure that the voices of Saudi women head teachers are heard by exploring their journeys and experiences of leadership in girls' secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Cultural norms and gender roles were a significant affective factor in the participating head teachers' journeys. The study's findings revealed that women head teachers were generally dissatisfied with their role in their schools, with this dissatisfaction deriving from a few key challenges.

Moreover, head teachers were impacted by several influencers that assisted them in responding to these challenges and continue developing their performance in their leadership roles. It is hoped that this research will assist in making female head teachers' voices heard in the upper levels of MoE policy-making and management, through exploring their role and level of involvement in leadership and decision making in girls' secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Change is a continuous process, but to secure effective change female head teachers need to both keep making their voices heard and work towards the required change in their schools. As the participant Sarah amply put it: 'rights are taken, not given, and to hold power we should fight for it, otherwise

it will never come'. Thus, female (educational) leaders, in general, have to take an active role in instituting change.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Consent form

Research Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am conducting research for my PhD in Education Leadership and Management. The title of my Research Project is:

Life histories of Saudi female head teachers: An exploration of their journeys and experiences of leadership.

This research aims at exploring the journeys of female head teachers to the headship position and their experiences from their careers. The study will be conducted through life history interviews with 12 female head teachers in girls' secondary schools in Saudi Arabia to collect data. Each interview will last between 60-90 minutes and will take place in the offices of the head teachers. Ethical guidelines for data collection will be followed and the interview will be recorded and stored safely and used only for the purpose of research. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be assured and your real name and school will not be used. You have a right to withdraw from the project at any time if you wish to do so. You can also request the return of data or interview transcripts.

Investigator Contact Details:
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Telephone: 00966502444422

Consent Statement:
I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name:…….
Signature: ……
Date ……

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with me as the researcher or my Director of Studies.However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

Director of Studies Contact Details:
Name: Dr Anthony Thorpe

Head of Department Contact Details:
Prof Andrew Stables

University Address : University of Roehampton .Roehampton Lane. London .SW15 5PJ

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Appendix B : Consent form in Arabic

نموذج موافقة علي المشاركه فى الدراسة
فى المملكة العربية السعودية.

أنا وفاء العجاجى طالبه دكتوراه فى جامعة روها متون) المملكة المتحده . **ان الهدف من هذا البحث ,هو الا خذ بالدراسة العلمية والدقيقة الى** اكتشاف رحله مديرات مدارس البنات الثانويه في السعوديه للوصول الى الاداره **و مشاركتهن خبراتهن والتحديات التي تواجههن في المدارس** ، تهدف هذه الدراسه الي فهم: التحديات التى تواجه المديرات ،التحقيق فى دور الثقافه العربيه علي فعاليه دور المديره في عملها الاداري.

و ستجري هذه الدراسة من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة مع ١٢ مديره في المدارس الثانويه في السعوديه وقد تستغرق المقابله من ٦٠ الى ٩٠ دقيقه و جميع المقابلات ستكون مسجلة صوتيا . جميع البيانات التى تم جمعها تكون مجهولة المصدر لضمان السرية) و لن تستخدم الاسماء الكاملة أو الحقيقية بما فى ذلك أسماء المدارس (يمكنك طلب عودة البيانات الخاصة بك أو نص المقابلة فى أى وقت.

وفاء العجاجى
قسم التربية والتعليم
جامعة روها تون
SW15 5PJ
المملكة المتحدة
البريد الاليكتروني alajajiw@roehampton.ac.uk :
رقم الهاتف00966502444422 :

نموذج موافقة :

أنا أوافق علي المشاركة فى هذا البحث و أدرك أننى حرة فى الأنسحاب فى أي لحظة . و أنا أفهم أنه سيتم التعامل مع المعلومات التى أقدمها بثقة من قبل الباحث و ستتم حماية هويتى فى نشر أى نتائج.

الأسم..... :
التوقيع.....:
التاريخ..... :

ملاحظة : أذا كان لديك قلق حول أى جانب من جوانب المشاركة ، يرجى مناقشة هذا الأمر معى أو المشرف علي بحثى الذي هو:

الأسم : الدكتور أنتونى ثورب
العنوان : قسم التربية والتعليم
جامعة روها متون
SW15 5PJ
المملكة المتحدة
البريد الأليكترونى a.thorpe@roehampton.ac.uk **:**
رقم الهاتف+44(0)2083923895 :

آو المشرف على قسم البحوث
الأسم : البرفيسور اندرو ستبلز
العنوان :قسم التربية والتعليم
جامعة روها متون
SW15 5PJ
المملكة المتحدة
البريد الأليكترونى Andrew.stables@roehampton.ac.uk **:**
رقم الهاتف+44(0)2083923865 :

Appendix C: Participant Debriefing Letter

Research Participant debriefing letter

Dear Participant,

Thank you for offering to take part /taking part in my research interview for my PhD in Education Leadership and Management. The title of my Research Project is:

Life histories of Saudi female head teachers: An exploration of their journeys and experiences of leadership.

This research aims at exploring the journeys of female head teachers to the headship position and their experiences from their careers. The study will be conducted through life history interviews with 12 female head teachers each lasting between 60-90 minutes and will take place in the offices of the head teachers. Ethical guidelines for data collection will be followed and the interview will be recorded and stored safely and used only for the purpose of research. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be assured and your real name and school will not be used. You have a right to withdraw from the project at any time if you wish to do so. You can also request the return of data or interview transcripts.

Please note: It is my intention and aim to leave all participants in this research with no unintended positive or negative effect. If by participating in this research you feel that you will suffer, be harmed or penalised due to your participation, and if you have further concerns about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with me as the researcher

-Investigator Contact Details:
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Telephone: 00966502444422

Or, my Director of Studies. However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Research in the School of Education.

2-Director of Studies Contact Details:
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Appendix D : Participant Debriefing Letter in Arabic

استخلاص معلومات

الى كل المديرات المشاركات في ا ستجوابات مشروع البحث:

رحله المرأه السعوديه الى الاداره وخبراتها خلال مزاولة عملها التعليمي

زميلاتي العزيزات,

ان الهدف من هذا البحث ,هو ألا خذ بالدراسة العلمية والدقيقة لدور المرأة المديرة في مدارس البنات الثانوية في السعوديه و مشاركتهن خبراتهن والتحديات التي تواجههن في المدارس . سيجرى البحث عبر سلسلة استجوابات حية مسجلة مع 12 مديرة مشاركة و تستمر مدة الاستجواب بين 90- 60 دقيقة وستقا هذه الاستجوابات في مكاتب المديرات . وستراعى كل التعليمات الاخلاقية المتبعة في جمع المعطيات و الحرص على استعمالها لاغرض البحث فقط

الا ستجواب يسجل ويوضع في مكان آمن .ونتعهد لكن بكل الثقة والامان بالمحافظة علي سرية الهوية واسم المدرسة و التفاصيل وسوف لايستخدمون ابدا . ولكن الحق في الا نسحاب من المشاركة متى شءتن وكذلك طلب ارجاع بيان الاستجواب .

وانتهز هذه الفرصة ان اتقدم بشكري الخالص لكل من المديرات الجليلات على المساهمة بوقتهن ومشاركتهن معي في استجوابات مشروع البحث واتمنى من الله ان يوفقنا جميعا للا ستفادة العامة منه .

و كذ لك اود ان انبه:

ان القصد و الهدف بعد انهاء اجرءات الستجواب أن أترك كلّ المشتركات معي في هذا البحث بدون اثر متوخى سواء كان إيجابي أم سلبي بمجرد مساهمتكن في هذا بحث اذا كنت تشعرين بأنكّ ستيعانين يضرّر او عقوبة ما بحكم مشاركتك ,واذا كان لديك اية اهتمامات اخرى في هذا الشأن ,فالمرجو ان تدلين بهذا لي كباحثة والقائمة بالمشروع ويمكن الاتصال بي

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او المشرف علي البحوث والدراسة بالجامعة مباشرة على:

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Appendix E : Ethics Approval statement

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference EDU 14/ 069 in the Department of Education and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 05.08.14

Appendix F: Sample of coded text

Initial code	Text
• **Satisfied with her role** • **Workload** • **Lack of resources and finances**	Actually, I enjoy everything in my work. I love my work very much except the paperwork, in addition to some things that hinder my work and goals, and limit my achievement in my school, such as lack of resources and finance.
• **Financial issues** • **Centralisation** • **Communication issue** • **Educational supervision**	When we work on new, innovative ideas to achieve great goals but lack financial resources, we take a step back, which is a painful, frustrating feeling that hinders creativity. I also do not enjoy the presence of people, both educational supervisors and teachers, who underestimate the importance of some of the work we do and its results. This is due to them either not wanting the work or not having the ambition to develop.

• **Centralisation** • **Educational supervision**	They care about the simple things, like routine paperwork, as opposed to aspects that can develop the school in both the behavioural and professional sense. For example, when I first started doing behavioral research focused on the study of some of the problems occurring within the school, whether between the teachers or with the students, whose analysis and extrapolation of the causes, results and solutions could be used to solve the problem. It also focuses on how to deal with problems in a more conscious way, using the basis of professionalism and scientific research.
• **Educational supervision**	Unfortunately, I found some disregard for the work either from the educational supervisors or some of the teachers, and this, as I mentioned, causes frustration and pain for people who work and dream of development. However, in all my work, I try not to care about the frustrations, but on the contrary, I make the effort to explain and clarify the outcome of the work and its goal to expand the perception of the person in front of me.

• **Lack of support from MoE** • **Communication with MoE** • **Personal relations**	Also, the need to repeatedly request resources from the ministry for the school, such as books or furniture, which is a waste of time and effort. The resources are not provided in a streamlined fashion, and it depends on personal relations. Personally, I do not like to communicate with men very much, as, from my experience, some individuals begin to discuss topics outside the scope of the work and involve more personal matters.
• **Centralisation** • **Lack of authority** • **Satisfaction with her role**	Also, some of the things that bother me a lot, the presence of some teachers who do not have any significant suitability for the role or do not want to develop themselves. Unfortunately, I do not have any authority to reform this issue. I consider the teacher to be the main factor determining the students' future success. These are some of the things that hinder me sometimes in my administration, even though, generally, I am positive and always enjoyed every achievement within my school and took pride in the level of education and behaviour of my students. I remain very optimistic for the future.

• **Centralisation** • **Lack of authority**	As for the role of the school director in making decisions within what the ministry has provided, it is considered to be average leaning towards low. We are considered a central system that has exhausted school principals, whether in not taking their views in the basic matters of choosing buildings or appliances, through to choosing teachers and explaining their decisions.
• **Centralisation** • **Lack of authority**	Most of the female directors are rigid in the positions given to them. They perform what they are requested to do by the ministry, which is satisfied with the minimum level of work (there is no excessive absence among the female students as well as the teachers, and the curricula being taught in accordance with ministerial regulations). The teacher does the minimum to meet the requirements of the ministry and does not want to exhaust herself with something she believes to be the responsibility of the ministry.

Appendix G: Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?
- What were your parents' occupations?
- Do you have any siblings?
- What are their occupations?
- Can you recall having any early ambitions for possible future occupations(s)?

2. Can you tell me a bit about your early educational experiences during your primary schooling?

- What was your primary school like?
- Was it a public or private school?
- Did you enjoy primary school? Why/why not?

3. Moving on, could you tell me a bit about your experiences of secondary school?

- What sort of secondary school did you attend?
- Did your primary school friends go to the same secondary school as you?
- How would you explain your experiences at your secondary school?
- Have you participated in school activities?
- Did you enjoy secondary school? Why/Why not?

4. Now, moving on to think about University time, did you apply to University?

- How was your university application organised?
- What subject did you study? Can you explain your choice?
- How did you get on at University?
- How would you explain your experiences at the University?
- Did you enjoy it or not? Why?
- What did you do when you left University?

5. Side-stepping slightly, moving now from your education to your career journey,

- Can you tell me a bit about your early career experiences? The process of becoming a teacher? Did you experience any difficulties?
- How many years of experience do you have in holding a teaching position?
- How would you explain your experiences when you were a teacher?
- Have you participated in any program or administration work?

6. Thinking now about your work experiences of being a head teacher of a secondary school,

- Was it planned, or was it happenstance?
- How long have you been in your current position?
- Can you describe the process of how you obtained a headship position?
- Can you describe your role as a head teacher in your school?

- How important do you perceive your role in your school to be?
- How satisfied are you with your role? Why or why not?

7. Side stepping slightly, can you explain a little bit about your family's position in relation to your work?

- Can you recall how any decisions about your career promotion?
- What counts as success for your family?
- How does your family feel about your work?
- Do you discuss your work at home?

8. Turning now to your role as a head teacher in your school, Can you tell me a little bit about what you enjoy about your current work and why?

- Can you describe your experiences of being a head teacher in your current post?
- Can you tell me what you don't enjoy about your work and why?
- How important is work in your life?
- If you were to make changes to enable female head teachers to have more power and freedom in their schools, what would be the first thing you would change?
- Can you explain your choices?
- How would you change these factors?
- Do you feel you have made a positive change as a head teacher? Can you give me an example?

9. Moving on, I want to think now about the factors influencing your role as a female head teacher:

- How do you make decisions in your secondary school?
- In your opinion, what affects this process?
- Are these internal or external factors?
  What would you do now, if anything, to alter your role at your school?

10. Could you tell me about any difficulties you face in your role as a head teacher

- What difficulties do you face in your role as a female head teacher?
- Do you think male head teachers face the same difficulties as female head teachers? Why, or why not?
- Could you describe an incident where you were faced with a challenge in your school?
- What do you think caused the problem you faced?
- Please explain what you did in this situation.

11. Thinking now about the Saudi context,

- In your opinion, what is the role of women in Saudi society?
- In your opinion, as a Saudi female head teacher, does this social structure in your country impact on your role in your secondary school? If yes, please explain how.
- In your view, do your male counterparts have a similar or different role and experiences of being a head teacher in Saudi Arabia? Could you give an example?
- Would you say that your male counterparts have an advantage over you in their role as a head teacher? Why/why not?
- What are the most challenging aspects that would be less challenging for a male head teacher?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me or discuss with me that hasn't already been mentioned?

Appendix H: An Example of an Interview Transcript

Wafa: Good morning. Thank you for hosting me and sharing your experiences.

Modi: Certainly, you're most welcome.

Wafa: Let's begin by talking about yourself and your family, the family from which you emerged. I would start by speaking about your parents' job. Where do they work?

Modi: Of course, now my father has retired, but he worked in a number of organisations prior to his retirement. He worked as a reporter in a government agency and then became an employee in the Ministry of Labour in its beginnings, and then he moved to the Municipality of Riyadh in the Planning Department after taking a training course for a year in economic planning. In fact, I can say that, my father is the son of the past and the present. He used to work on his father's farm with his brothers and as such he did not attend school until quite late. My father studied at the first scientific institute in Saudi Arabia in its early stages of establishment before it became a university. He always tells us how the life was simple and difficult at the same time and retells the story of his past life. He tells us how much he struggled but he learned many lessons and obtained experiences before enrolling in an education. He tells us that although he struggled, he learned a lot from life and those experiences are not free. 'Go and try for yourself' was his famous saying to me and my brothers, and I expect that this is what created a confidence and love of knowledge in my life and in my work as well.

Wafa: What about your mother? What was her job and how did she raise you?

Modi: My mother did not complete her education, only the basics of reading and writing, but she is very affectionate and calm. My mother and father are very sympathetic and supportive of each other. I was brought up in quiet and warm home. Our life was very simple but we were raised on love and containment and participation. We were given simple responsibilities which we learned from. Even my relationship with my brothers and sisters, from a young age until the present, is a wonderful relationship of love and support. I always consider my success and happiness was a result of my family and the environment that I grew up in.

Wafa: To what extent do you believe the environment that you grew up in affected you? I mean, did you have an early readiness or interest in management from a young age?

Modi: To be honest, I did not have an aspiration to become a leader from a young age. But to be truthful, I did have the necessary characteristics to become a leader or carry out administrative work, including insight, calmness, accepting others despite individual differences. I learnt to accept others regardless of their behavioral, social, or intellectual qualities. I learnt to use my initiative and take the lead without waiting for others' help. It is not only me that possesses these qualities; rather it is there in all my family members, from my parents, to my siblings. What I mean is that I grew up in a stable environment. My mother and father understood each other very well and supported each other. They also dealt with us warmly and positively, offering us many opportunities to learn new tasks. I can say that my administrative success goes back to my family and the environment I was brought up in.

Wafa: Can we talk about your brothers and sisters? Could you tell me about your brothers and sisters?

Modi: As for my brothers, I have 2, one of them works in business while the other is an engineer. All of my sisters are teachers but I'm the only one who works as a school principal.

Wafa: Let's talk about your early school education. Where did you study when you were in elementary and secondary education?

Modi: In fact, all my education was in public schools.

Wafa: Well, can you tell me a little about those days?

Modi: As for my primary and secondary school education, it was very ordinary and calm. The teaching method was very traditional and depended heavily on indoctrination. The teacher explained, and the students only listened without any focus or importance put on the development of their abilities or discovery of the skills of students. The teacher was only interested in noting if the homework was complete or not, explaining the lesson without any open discussion between the teacher and student. Most of the schools at the time were based on the traditional method with no focus on developing skills or discovering the talents of students.

Wafa: What do you mean? Can you tell me more about your experience of the events and activities, or even the presence of a role model from the teachers which led to your interest in management?

Modi: Often there was a dictatorship, and the teacher's power made the student prefer not to ask questions or share an idea, as opposed to opening a discussion with the teacher. In other aspects, all I remember is that I was very calm and full of life. If you saw me now as a leader, you wouldn't believe I was the same quiet student in school. I mean, no one was there to explain or encourage me to participate. In other words, you would not believe that I was the same calm secondary school student. No one asked or thought about things that stimulate thinking or develop personality and they do not cross your mind. (laughs)

Wafa: Now, when you moved to the university, did anything change? How was your experience at this stage of your education and your choice of major?

Modi: At the university level, it was a stage of enthusiasm for new experiences, especially in the teaching and learning method; as you know, the routine of classes is different from school but my personality remained calm.

Wafa: What did you choose to study?

Modi: I studied Art Education.

Wafa: Beautiful. Did you choose it yourself? Have you ever loved art since childhood?

Modi: To be honest, it was a very average subject for me, I didn't love it or hate it, it was a random decision. (laughs)

Wafa: How so?

Modi: My high school was in the Literary stream and the available specializations were very limited for this stream, no more than four options. So, I chose technical education, perhaps because I did not love memorising and I thought it would be easier than the other practical options. But in fact I found myself in this major, and I really enjoyed my studies. I really enjoyed studying Art; through it, I learnt to be more creative and to view every situation from different perspectives, just as each shape I saw had multiple dimensions. Studying this subject affected my personality as it taught me how to deal with each person in a different way. Through Art Education, I learned creativity, innovation and how to thinking in different ways. Art taught me how to see different situations and people from several angles and aspects, just like painting canvases and images that can have subliminal meanings. Art changed my personality because it taught me how to treat people in the way that suits them. Art is wonderful and

is very important in life. If the ministry and students and the general public knew what it had to offer it would not be such a marginal discipline.

Wafa: Where extra-curricular activities available at the university, were you active in these activities?

Modi: There were very limited activities and these did not suit me. I was very calm and my main concern was my studies only.

Wafa: Ok, were there any activities that you would have liked to participate in?

Modi: I don't remember there were special activities especially for girl students. Boys might have had sports activities or excursions, but girls, as you know, we don't have activities, possibly just voluntary work within the university.

Wafa: May I now move on to your professional life? Can you talk a little about your professional beginnings? Searching for a job, the opportunities that were available, any difficulties that you might have faced?

Modi: As soon as I graduated, I presented my paperwork to the employment agency in the ministry and then I got the job.

Wafa: Were there special requirements beside the application at the time?

Modi: Only my university degree, and a medical examination to prove health eligibility. At the time, we used to hand it all in personally. The electronic registration was not available, as it is now. The important thing was that we handed over our files after receiving the graduation certificate from the university. Almost two months later they contacted me to tell me the name of the school where I would be working and I started work.

Wafa: Did you complete an interview or test before starting work?

Modi: Not at all, the system just sent the file and they chose on the basis of the vacancies in schools. When we finished our university education, we were lucky as they were in need of teachers and they wanted anyone to fill the vacancy. The system was like this, 'just send your application to the MoE'. The process of acceptance was based on the field's needs and the MoE was in need of many female teachers, so consequently the vast majority of females who had applied were accepted. The MoE just wanted to fill job vacancies.

Wafa: Well, let's just talk about your experience in the teaching profession? How many years did you work as a teacher before you moved to administration?

Modi: Ten years. I enjoyed it very much. I worked in two schools during this period. In fact, in the first school, I did not stay for long as I did not find it suitable. The principal was somewhat dictatorial and the atmosphere in the school was uncomfortable, besides, it was far from my home. I applied to be transferred to another school. To be honest, I enjoyed working as a teacher for ten years. We worked as an amazing and outstanding team. I delivered training courses to other teachers and also helped my students by creating and giving them positive encouragement. We also helped students to innovate and create. We made an art gallery in the school, which included art produced by all students from all stages despite the lack of resources at that time. Further, during the teaching period, I always participated in the management team in some form.

Wafa: Going back to our discussion about your education in school and university, you mentioned that you were very quiet and you didn't make many contributions. In your professional life, I noticed that you mentioned a wealth of wonderful and positive contributions. Why this difference?

Modi: That's true, I don't know, I do not remember myself. In my student years I feel that I was another human. I may be mentally programmed to believe that a good student must be calm and polite!

Wafa: Ok, we'll talk about your headship experience, how did you acquire the position of school principal?

Modi: I had worked as a principal assistant for two years, then I became a head teacher after the former head teacher had moved on to another school. This was because I was nominated by the former school head teacher and the Office of Educational Supervision without being subjected to any interview or test. I only sent my file and completed the form, which was just a procedure, rather than being accepted or rejected. This was the prevailing process at the time, as I mentioned earlier regarding the appointment of managers, often without any specific conditions, as they were only looking to fill a vacancy.

Wafa: How long have you remained in your position as school principal?

Modi: 12 years

Wafa: Well, now as a school principal, do you take your work home? As in, do you discuss your work at home?

Modi: I discuss my work and talk about it at times at home, but I try to separate my work and home lives, and this separation between them in my view is necessary for the success and stability of both places (home and school). I believe that one should not affect another, especially as it is in our nature as humans to be affected by what is happening around us, but this effect must be limited and preferably be a positive effect only.

Wafa: Ok. How do your family feel about you being a principal?

Modi: It is a beautiful and natural feeling, but in more recent year they began to get fed up because of the exhaustion and pressure of administrative work, which often takes my time and energy, and a lot of my thinking too.

Wafa: Well, does your family have a role in your work? Can you tell me a little about this?

Modi: In the context of my family and my sisters, I rarely talk about my work because we only meet from time to time. It is not appropriate to bring the concerns of work and mention it in this limited time that is supposed to be enjoyable. Also, none of my siblings work as a manager and as such they do not have experience in my field. As for my immediate family, I try to separate work from home, but I always find myself talking to my daughters about my day-to-day activities. I often benefit from their views, especially in dealing with female students who are at the same age as my daughters. I try to understand well what benefits the students both on the level of reward or punishment. As for my husband, I rarely speak to him about my job. He is very busy. He works as an engineer in a large company and comes home late, in addition to the fact that the nature of his job is different and he has no experience in school administration.

Wafa: From your experience as a principal, how would you describe the role of the principal in her school?

Modi: The role of the school head teacher in her school is very large. She is the role model to her students and teachers. Her understanding and organisation of the work

and accurate follow-up enable her to enhance the level of teachers and students' performance, and thus improve the level of thought and improve the education outcomes in the school in particular, and in the country generally.

Wafa: Ok, what are the aspects of your management that you enjoy and others that you do not enjoy?

Modi: Actually, I enjoy everything in my work. I love my work very much except the paperwork, in addition to some things that hinder my work and goals, and limit my achievement in my school, such as lack of resources and finance. When we work on new, innovative ideas to achieve great goals but lack financial resources, we take a step back, which is a painful, frustrating feeling that hinders creativity. I also do not enjoy the presence of people, both educational supervisors and teachers, who underestimate the importance of some of the work we do and its results. This is due to them either not wanting the work or not having the ambition to develop. They care about the simple things, like routine paperwork, which is in opposition to our opportunities to develop the school in both a behavioural and professional sense. Let me tell you that the female educational supervisor, she devalued our performance and achievements in the school. For example, I conducted research to assess behaviour problems among students. The results of my research may help us in evaluating students' difficulties. Unfortunately, this effort was disapproved of and underestimated by the education supervisor. This, as I mentioned, causes frustration and pain for people who work and dream of development. However, in all my work, I try not to care about the frustrations, but on the contrary, I make the effort to explain and clarify the outcome of the work and its goal to expand the perception of the person in front of me.

Also, there is the need to repeatedly request resources for the school from the ministry, such as books or furniture, which is a waste of time and effort. The resources are not provided in a streamlined fashion and it depends on personal relations. Personally, I do not like to communicate with men very much. From my experience, some individuals in the MoE begin to discuss topics outside the scope of the work and involve more personal matters.

Also, some of the things that bother me a lot, the presence of some teachers who do not have any significant suitability for the role or do not want to develop themselves. Unfortunately, I do not have any authority to reform this issue. I consider the teacher to be the main factor for the students' future success. These are some of the things that

hinder me sometimes in my administration, even though, generally, I am positive and always enjoyed every achievement within my school and took pride in the level of education and behaviour of my students. I remain very optimistic for the future.

Wafa: Ok, how would you describe the importance of your role as a decision maker at your school?

Modi: In terms of the principal's role in making decisions, the MoE gave me a moderate or low role. We have a highly centralized educational system and this centralization exhausted school principals. The MoE did not confer with them or take their views on important issues. I mean that our views are not considered in the basic matters such as choosing buildings, tools, or applicant teachers. They just export the decisions without sometimes the explanation. Head teachers just receive the decisions. They did what the MoE asked them to do, and not more than that.

Most of the female head teachers are rigid in the level of authority given to them. They perform what they are requested to do by the ministry. They tend to be satisfied with the minimum level of work (there is no excessive absence among the female students as well as the teachers, and the curricula being taught in accordance with ministerial regulations). The teacher does the minimum to meet the requirements of the ministry and does not want to exhaust herself with something she believes to be the responsibility of the ministry.

Wafa: So, can we talk about your satisfaction level with the role you're given by the MoE in your school?

Modi: My satisfaction with the role given to me, I can describe it as moderate, I can make decisions in my school to a moderate level. Similarly, the implementation of my decisions is at a moderate level. The MoE's regulations give us authority but unfortunately these regulations are just on paper, not in actual practice.

My view has a kind of transparency on this subject because I am somewhat in agreement with the ministry in giving the managers this level of power. In fact, most principals were chosen for this position without any conditions or requirements. Some of them brought a medical report indicating that they cannot stand for a long time in class and cannot teach. And others wanted to be principals because they thought they would have power in their hands. So, they are lacking the professional skills to make the right

decisions. They lack professional culture and significant experience in the administrative field. This does not only depend on the method of choosing the director without conditions, but even after they take their position, as there are no development programmes or training to develop head teachers' performances. Head teachers' development comes from two sources:

Firstly, the head teacher herself is supposed to develop herself by searching through resources, reading, or attending courses, without waiting for others to do this task for her. We are always waiting for someone to make a start, and always attach our mistakes and shortcomings to others.

Secondly, the responsibility for the shortage in head teachers' performances is on the ministry's shoulders. The MoE is responsible for their selection, and for following up on their head teachers. The MoE should conduct courses and regular supervision programmes to meet the needs of each individual head teacher and measure their development. The MoE should make regular assessment for head teachers by looking at their schools' outcomes. By these methods the performance of head teachers could be judged. I think the level of power and authority should be given to the head teachers based on their performances in their schools. Often, in meetings I see some head teachers who do not give any good image of head teacher efficiency. On the contrary, sometimes I meet with head teachers who are worthy of much more, and I am sure that if they are given more power, they will become pioneers in the school headship field.

Wafa: If you were given the opportunity to have more authority as a principal, what kind of authority you would take? What kind of authority you are looking for as a principal?

Modi: I would have the power to select teachers for appointment or at least the authority of transferring them from one school to another as required. Also the power to choose the school guard, as well as authority to evaluate his performance based on what I see. Unfortunately, most of them are careless in their work. They neglect their work, even in the simple tasks like opening the school gate in the morning or closing it in the afternoon, and requirements such as the delivery of school mail, or other tasks. However, unfortunately, I do not have any means to follow up on his carelessness. He is aware that the ministry is supposed to follow up, but will not come to take his actions into account, and will not take notes in mind, they understand that the presence of a person at the door is enough regardless of the quality of his work. I hope that there is

authority in the hands of the principal to arrange support for students or lessons at the end of the school day for those that need it, in agreement with willing teachers. The ministry gave us limited and ineffective authority, which allows the principal to prolong the school day whenever she sees fit. In reality, can I do it on my own? The teachers will not agree without a higher salary and the arrangement of this matter is one of the responsibilities of the ministry.

I wish I could control the catering process for students, I mean choosing the appropriate company to supply food for the students and determining the contract with them. I want to benefit the students and increase the income of the school. The ministry has contracted with a very poor company to bring breakfast and lunch for students with poor quality and high prices. We reported the lack of suitability of this company and took pictures and sent it to the ministry to tack action. The health of students is our responsibility but we did not receive any response from the ministry. It is possible this catering company is owned by someone with strong personal relationships with the ministry official, and we remain the victims of this nepotism.

Further, it is useful to place a large amount of money in the hands of the principal to be able deal with school needs in a timely manner; each school has special needs. The reality is that the current principals are not allowed to have any large amount of money because they do not take control of finances. I am sure that they will be divided into two parts, those who will be sloppy and spend excessively merely to increase popularity or in décor, and others who will not spend at all because of fear of being held accountable or being asked about how the money was spent.

Finally, I wish to work in my school as in an independent institution and to give each principal power and authority according to the school's quality and outcomes.

Wafa: What are the factors that affect your role in your school?

Modi: Actually, the student's benefit is one of the biggest factors that affect me; it either encourages or discourages me to make important decisions. My previous experience, including past events is also another factor. In the past I used to go back to the Ministry and the Supervisory offices in every single matter and align myself with their standards and expectations. However, from my experiences, I can tell you that my fear and hesitation reduced in making decisions in my school. I certainly do my work for the benefit of the school and [in the] interest of all staff. My feeling of powerlessness

has reduced when dealing with supervisory offices or the Ministry. Also, for my students' benefit, I always tried to maintain a good relationship with the supervisory offices and Ministry, which meant that they rarely stood against me as long as I had the convincing reasons and evidence. The officials respect me as they have seen my previous achievements or hear about my performance.

Wafa: What are the challenges that you face in doing your job at your school?

Modi: Every person who works and develops must face challenges and obstacles while those who fail stands in place without advancement, only blaming others. But the word ‘challenges’ has a different meaning and influence for me now from when I was new to my headship position. As I mentioned earlier, in the past, every single matter I needed to make a decision about, small or large, was met with hesitation, and I always sought approval from the educational supervisory and Ministry offices. However, I can say that from the experience I gained, I realized that no one can stand in the way of someone who works correctly, even if the actions taken are not listed as part of their administrative role, as long as it does not hurt anyone, serves the educational process, and is built upon solid foundations of education and systematic planning, it will be successful. I mean, through my experience I learnt that no one can stand in the face of those who complete their work correctly, even if the procedure does not exist within the formal regulations, as long as this work does not harm anyone.

Three months ago I was invited to visit Singapore with a group of female leaders. We learnt about many systems and teaching methods. I wanted to deliver what I learnt from this visit to my school's teachers, needing at least five hours to explain these programmes. I mean, this needs a whole day, not separate times. So, I decided to give all students one day off and assigned a day. I prepared the venue for the training course, the information that I would like to deliver to the teachers. I contacted the educational supervisory team telling them that I would ask parents not to send their daughters to the school in the specific day. I told them I would explain the reason behind students' absence so the parents could understand. At the beginning, the supervisor refused my request saying that the Ministry doesn’t accept the absence of female students in a working day. She added that it would be my total responsibility, and would be done at my own risk. I asked her, what would be the benefit of the course I attended in Singapore, if we were unable to transfer the knowledge to the teachers, so that we would be able to implement the program. I told her that I would take responsibility, and I did

what I planned. Fortunately, I have not received any complaints or criticisms from the Ministry for the action I took, whether they knew about it or not. At that point I realised that power is taken and not given.

There are also other challenges that I cannot deal with such as financial deficiency. Following up things by phone and chasing up people or issues is another challenge, as things do not go smoothly. This is because personal relations come before the interest of work. In some cases, officials speak about change and development but they are only speaking about it theoretically; they are unable to admit and take responsibility for their errors. There is sometime a lack of drive to change, either from teachers or educational supervisors. False understanding, and a lack of awareness of certain forward-thinking decisions and acts by both teachers and educational supervisors are hindering school development.

Wafa: I would like you to talk about the society where we live. As a woman, how do you see the role of women in Saudi society?

Modi: The woman in Saudi society plays substantial and important roles, in my view. She has got respect and her opinion in her home and society is being heard. If women in some families suffer from problems, this is a rare case, but not as portrayed by the global media. She may have been weak in the past, but now and especially after she had access to education, she became independent financially. She has proven her position and role in the society. The majority of women are independent in their decisions and their lives. They have their own business projects. In some instances, women may need men's help, but they cannot be forced to do anything they do not want to.

Wafa: In your opinion, as a female principal in the Saudi society, does the system affect the decision-making process in your school?

Modi: Certainly, the social construction in the country impacts on my role as a female leader, particularly in making some decisions. I always consider our cultural perception of women; I bear in mind general ideas about what is acceptable or unacceptable for women when dealing with numerous issues. I work with different minds and ideas, including those who are receptive to change and those who are resistant to change and development, even if it does not hurt. I do not remember any specific situations, but I often find myself observing habits and traditions.

Wafa: Such as?

Modi: When I call one of the officials regarding the school matters, they misunderstand the process of tracking our inquiries, as I mentioned earlier, and they do not appreciate a woman's enthusiasm for her work. They only appreciate her enthusiasm in the home: some of the officials move beyond the scope of the call and talk about personal topics, and so I always avoid phone calls with them, especially as there is a prevalent culture about the way in which men and women deal with each other.

Wafa: In your opinion, are male principals given more authority than female principals?

Modi: As I know, the authority provided by the ministry is equal for all. However, I am sure that there is a big difference in the method and approach of the implementation. In most of our Saudi society, it is easy for men to move and track their school's inquiries. If the regulations do not serve their schools' interests, their personal relations do. Also, the nature of men is different, they are more flexible than women when dealing with others; their understanding of things are better. Men usually don't pay much attention to the inconsequential things, this helps them very much in their work being processed. This includes male principals and male educational supervisors. But in the end, I would like to say that the level of authority and gender are not the major factors that affect the work quality and productivity, but understanding the work responsibility and devotion to duty.

Wafa: Would you like to add anything at the end?

Modi: Yah, I would say that there are some characteristics help head teachers to make great improvements in their schools, such as being dedicated and taking care of the students. This eventually keeps the head teacher advancing in her work. For me, I think that I had all the skills that can facilitate administrative work, such as calmness, having a perspective on the future, and self-initiative.

Wafa: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to talk to you.